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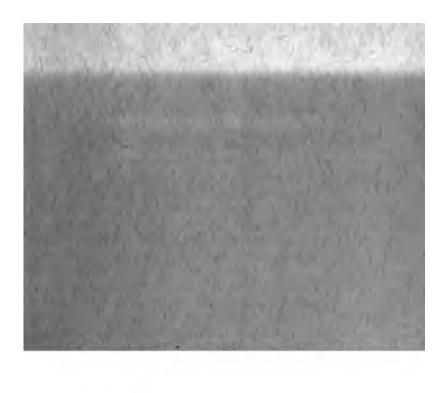
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LADY LEONORA.

By CARRIE CONKLIN.

POPULAR NOVELS

IN THE

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NEW YORK.

LADY LEONORA;

OR,

FATHER'S THE CURSE.

A Novel

BY CARRIE CONKLIN.

LIBRANII.
NEW YORK. "Oft have I roved by Bonny Doon To see the rose and woodbine twine. And every bird sang of its love And fondly so did I of mine. With lightsome heart I pulled a rose-A rose from off its thorny tree-And my false lover stole the rose, But, ah! he left the thorn with me."





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OF THE

NEW YORK WEEKLY,

THE LEADING STORY AND SECTOR PAPER OF THE AGE.

To

THE READERS OF THE

NEW YORK WEEKLY,

WHO FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS, HAVE STOOD FAITHFULLY BY US, CHEER-

, ING US IN OUR LABORS,

AND BIDDING US

GOD-SPEED;

TO WHOM OUR

PET JOURNAL HAS BECOME
A HOUSEHOLD WORD, AND WITHOUT

WHOSE AID WE COULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED NOTHING, THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED

BY THE PUBLISHERS,

STREET & SMITH.

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LADY LEONORA.

CHAPTER I.

THE CURIOUS PASSENGER.

"The earl, they say, is dying."

This was the remark of Joe Scofield to a stranger, who, one autumn afternoon, was seated beside him on his coach, as the vehicle whirled on its journey from the railroad station at Lockport to the village of Charnett. They had been talking—or at least Joe had, the stranger merely listening, and seeming but little interested until the driver, after pointing out the grand old dwelling which had been the home of the Earls of Charnett for over a century, carelessly remarked that the present earl was dying.

The stranger started slightly, threw away the cigar he had been smoking, and at once became an attentive listener.

- "Dying, did you say?" he asked; "the earl dying?"
- "Yes, sure as I'm driving this coach. He hasn't been himself since young Lord Sydney went away. They've tried all the doctors about here, but 'tweren't a bit of use. New there's one coming down from London; but he can't help the earl. I know what would cure him. I know what's killing him. It's pride a-fretting his very soul out, and strivin' agin love. Why, there wasn't a nobler nor a handsomer young gentleman to be seen than Lord Sydney—he's the doctor the old man wants."
 - "Why did Lord Sydney leave his father?"
 - "Why," said Scofield, rubbing his forehead sorrowfully with

the butt-end of his whip, "you see the old man wanted him to make a grand match, but not he. I remember it well enough, and they always was a queer family. There was three brothers first—the earl and two more; and the youngest of the two was shot—some say by poachers, others whisper it was done in a duel with the eldest, about a lady; anyhow, the eldest one went abroad with the same lady."

"That is some time ago, I suppose?"

"About two-and-thirty years. The second brother took the earldom. Then, about twelve years ago, a young fellow comes saying he's a nevy of the earl's, being the son of him as went abroad, d'ye see?"

"I comprehend perfectly." The stranger said this between his teeth, and with a smile.

"Well, out he went—the earl would have nothing to do with him; and it's said he swore to have revenge for something or other; it's revengeful blood, the Charnetts' is."

"But about the boy Sydney-what was his offense?"

"Oh! I'd nigh forgot that warn't told yet. You see he ran away with a French or Italian opera-singer, and it went against the old man's grain. Lor! and such a beautiful creature as she were, fit to be a queen, if only for her looks, and so proud of her as young Lord Sydney was. He thought, to be sure, the earl wouldn't be angry with him for marrying a lovely girl like that, but it caused a frightful scene. They do say the old man cursed him, swore he'd never see him again to his dying day; but I can't believe that—it ain't natur."

"There are some men of curious nature in the world, my friend," said the stranger; "and the Charnetts are not a forgiving race."

"You may well say that; they went to Lockstone in this very coach—Lord Sydney and the lady—and they never come back since."

"The family history seems no secret."

"Lor bless you, sir, who can keep secrets with a houseful of

servants prying into their master's business, and chatting it all over the place? I have told just the bare truth; it seemed nattural to talk about it when we spoke of Charnett."

The coach whirled onward rapidly, and the lodge-gate of Charnett came in sight. The stranger seemed curiously interested by the driver's story, and kept his gazev fixed moodily on the stately pile that now loomed through the twilight and the trees.

"A gentleman with nothing to do might spend a pleasant day or so down here," hazarded Joe; "and there is some of the finest wine that ever sparkled laid down in the cellars at the 'Falcon's Nest.' I know it," he added, with a smile; "for besides running this coach, which I have done for the past thirty years, I keep the village tavern, and know that the wine is good."

"I shall stay in the neighborhood for a few days," said the stranger, arousing from his reverie; "and your house will do very well, I have no doubt. Is it far?"

"Just a couple o' mile past the lodge, sir."

"The lodge-gate is my present destination, but I may be at 'The Nest' to-night. Have a cigar, Mr. Scofield, and do not be surprised if we touch a bottle of that wine you mentioned."

The driver reined his team in at the lodge, and the stranger got down.

"There was a lawyer here," he said, pausing with his foot upon the wheel; "Uxley, I think, was his name."

"Right, sir. Reuben Uxley—looks as young as ever he was. Lives in the same old house with the high brick wall round it. That's at fa'ther end of Charnett—a way back."

"Thank you."

The coach went on. The stranger, moving forward, came face to face with three passengers whom the vehicle had kept from his view while it stood.

They were a lady, vailed closely; a gentleman, slender, tall, and pale—an invalid evidently; and a child, a little fair-haired

girl, whose age was perhaps four years, certainly not more than five.

The stranger came upon them like a shadow, and the three shrank back with an involuntary recoil. There was the same look, partly doubt and partly recognition, upon the face of each, but the stranger passed them without a word.

They went to the lodge. The stranger strode back up the road, and his splendid black eyes burned with sinister fire. He did not cast a look behind him, but he muttered between his teeth:

"The old man dying, and Sydney here with her—and a child!"

Now he turned to look at them. A bend in the road left in full view the long avenue leading to the hall.

They were not in the avenue, therefore he inferred they must have entered the keeper's lodge.

He did not pause, but continued his way till he reached the house with the high brick wall round it. The dwelling was an old-fashioned, rambling building of the Elizabethan period.

A huge wooden bell-handle, attached to a heavy chain, swung by the door, and creaked harshly as the stranger pulled it. He waited some few moments for a reply, and then the antiquated face of a gaunt woman peered at him through the grated opening in the door.

He was admitted. The woman fell back dumbly, and as the tall form strode up to the doorway, she glanced at the handsome face, bearded and bronzed, and gasped out:

"It's him!"

So great was the effect upon her, whatever may have been the cause, that for the first time in her life the woman forgot to lock and bar the gate. She went with an air of feeble stupefaction after the stranger, who had gone without ceremony, and as though perfectly acquainted with the way, into Reuben Uxley's private room.

It was nearly twelve years since these two had met, and in that

time the stranger had changed from a delicate, slim youth into a powerful man, who looked older than he was; but in the face there was that which time could not obliterate—a keen, proud cynicism on the lip, a darkness and a gloom of brow that gave a touch of demoniac beauty to a countenance otherwise incomparable.

Reuben Uxley, sitting with a pile of yellow parchment and some loose strings of faded red tape before him, betrayed by no token his great surprise—not a twitch of the lip, not a quiver of the eyelid, not a blenching in the eye itself. Long contest with the world had hardened his nerves into iron.

"Michael Ewrick," he said, quietly, "you are welcome back to Charnett—take a seat."

"Thank you, Uxley. You still retain that steadiness of nerve which was your most valuable characteristic."

The lawyer did not notice the remark.

"You received my letter?" he said.

" No."

"No? Addressed to the Hotel de la Rein in Paris?"

"No. What were the contents?"

"None important or dangerous," said Uxley; "simply a request that you would come here at once. Why, if you have not received my letter, did you come?"

"Because I saw by accident a notice of my uncle's serious illness; that brought me to Charnett. I saw just now my Cousin Sydney with his wife and child—that brought me to Reuben Uxley."

"Lord Sydney here with his wife and child!" said the lawyer, in reflection. "That's strange; he has not been sent for."

"How do you know?"

"Because I have not been sent for. Had the old man recalled the son to forgive him, my services would have been required."

"What for?"

"To draw out another will, revoking the one that disinherits Sydney, and leaves Charnett to the next of *legitimate* kin."

"Do you share the general doubt?" asked Ewrick, in a tone that made the lawyer look at him.

"What if I do—or not? What if I had moral faith in the justice of your claims? What if I had entire moral knowledge of it?"

"I know," said Ewrick, bitterly, "it would be useless. This is a land of legal institutions, where a doubt may make the guiltless worse than guilty—where the law can kill. It killed my mother."

The deadly strong intensity with which he said the last words caused a thrill to run through Uxley's veins.

"It might have killed me," Ewrick continued, "but I am not made of sensitive or perishable stuff—I lived it down. There is some alteration in me, Reuben Uxley."

"Much; few would recognize you."

"The twelve years of my manhood have been a lingering life-time; at the age of eighteen I came here a boy—an orphan, sorrowing over his mother's death. My father had repudiated her—and me."

"I have heard that before. Colonel Ewrick, Earl of Charnett, had a weakness for womankind, and when sated was not scrupulous as to the means of riddance. Does he live?"

"No; he insulted my mother—spurned her—and died."

"He was not a temperate man," said Uxley, suppressing a shiver at the thought that would come when he looked at the other, "and excess of any kind tells in time upon the constitution. Proceed—you came here at the age of eighteen."

"To ask the earl, my uncle, to help me in shaping out a career. Do you know what was the answer?"

"Not exactly."

"Mark you, I did not want my own inheritance, I did not want the shameful story dragged to light, I did not want his money—it was influence alone. Hear the reply: he did not

know me, threw a doubt upon my parentage, a black and bitter insult on my mother's grave; he was sorry for me—very—and he gave me money. I should like to wring in anguish from him drops of blood for every coin he gave."

- "Your stay here was not long," said Uxley, unmoved by the other's fierce emotion.
 - "Long enough."
- "To do some mischief. A man's sins follow him, Michael Ewrick. That girl—Kendrake's sister——"
 - "What of her?"
- "She lies buried here in Charnett church-yard. She died broken-hearted."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

- "A passing fancy," he said; "a caprice gratified and forgotten. She should have forgotten me and married some clodhopper too gross of sense to heed the past. I wonder you mentioned her."
- "You will not when I tell you why. Her brother, John Kendrake, the foster-brother of young Sydney, is chief game-keeper and forest ranger. He is a dead shot, too; and will not be likely to forget the man who wronged his sister."
- "Thanks for the caution; but there is nothing in human strength or human skill that I could not face. I have faced a wild buffalo with a single shot in my rifle, and felt no tremor in hand or heart. I have fought a panther hand to hand—strangled it to death like a cat. So I shall not tremble if I meet John Kendrake."
 - "Very well-you have the warning."
- "I have; it is not worth a thought; and now to our business. What are the chances in my favor?—what are the chances against me?"
- "Against you, that the earl, who now is on his death-bed, may forgive his son—then all will be over with you."
 - "That will not be."
 - "What would prevent it?"

"The old man's death—and any sudden shock would kill him; and saying that we stop the revocation of the now existing will, what is my chance?"

- "Proof of your legitimacy. Nothing more is wanted."
- "We can get those proofs, Reuben Uxley."
- "How—the minister dead—the church in ashes—not a witness to be found?"

Michael Ewrick ground his teeth.

"Oh, my mother!" he said, clasping his hands to his brow. "Your name shall stand out spotless, though to wash the stain away I have to steep myself to the lips in a crimson sea."

There was something at once sublime and terrible in the reverence of this strong man for an injured parent's memory.

- "Help me," he said. "Let there be unity between us. Set to work some of that devilish subtlety and legal craft you have; prove what I want proved—no matter at what cost."
- "Wait," said the lawyer; "be patient. There were between your mother and myself some old ties that Reuben Uxley has not forgotten."

He took the hand of Michael Ewrick in a grip close and powerful.

"I, too," he hissed, "hate the earl. I will strike him yet so sharply that his spirit shall writhe in the vault. The proofs of your mother's marriage shall be obtained; and you—you, Michael Ewrick—shall tread the Charnett floor as lord and master."

CHAPTER IL

THE FOSTER BROTHERS.

The sun sinking low behind Charnett's lofty hills lent the red dusk of its dying glow to the faces of two men who sat by the lodge window.

They were the foster brothers, John Kendrake, and Lord Syd-

ney, the disinherited; and he sat there like a stranger, while his sire lay on his death-bed in the great house not a mile off.

"Let her go," said John Kendrake, who had Lord Sydney's delicate white hand locked in his own. "Let her go and take the child. That would touch his heart, Sydney, even if it were of stone. I am sure he would forgive you.

The invalid looked sadly at the beautiful, dark face of her who sat on a low footstool by his side. He looked sadly at the fair child, whose fair brow lay nestling on his knee.

"But his curse went with me when I left home," he said, huskily. "He swore that never to his last hour would he forgive me. It was a bitter thing to hear, Jack, my father's curse; and he hurled an awful wish at me. I know I disappointed his ambition and his pride; but he need not have done that."

"An awful wish. Well, well, brother Sydney, he is very passionate, you know, and says things in anger that he is sorry for afterward. Don't think of it. Let the lady go with little Alice. Let him know you are here, and he will send for you. I know he will."

"But the wish, Jack, the wish! He hoped that if ever I came back to Charnett I should die before I set foot on the threshold of his door. He said that the turf of this, my native place—my home—should run red with my blood. He asked Heaven to witness the curse invoked upon his disobedient son, and he spoke it like a prophecy."

"That was dreadful," said Kendrake, with a shudder; "but he did not mean it. I would swear he repented having said so, but his pride kept him from confessing it. He's not the severe stoic he would seem, Sydney. I have often watched at night outside the window of the room that was yours in the old time, and I have seen his shadow on the curtains. He has gone there to think of you—perhaps even to pray for you, Sydney; for I have seen his head bowed, and knew he had been weeping."

"If I could think so,"

- "Be sure of it—try. Let the lady go, and little Alice with her."
- "What say you, Leonora?" asked Sydney, turning to the darkeyed beauty by his side.
- "I will go; it is my duty. I am sure I shall not plead in vain. Will you come, too?"
- "Not till I hear his message. To be sent back would kill me."
- "My poor Sydney," said the lady, tenderly, "I have brought much trouble to you."
- "And you have been my only solace, Leonora. My father's curse would have fallen more heavily had you not clung to me. Then there is our child—my little darling Alice. I have a presentiment, Leonora. I seem to see my boyhood's home as through a spectral gloom. It is not fancy. There is a voice within me that tells me I shall never see my father again."
- "A superstition grown of overwrought imagination," said Leonora, trying to smile in spite of the cold, creeping fear his words caused her to feel. "I, too, have a presentiment, dear Sydney. I shall come back to bring your father's forgiveness, and take you to him."
- "That is the best presentiment," said Kendrake, placing his strong hand gently on Sydney's shoulder; "you are not well, and some of the old German books you are so fond of have left their fancies in your head. Come, let me cheer you while Lady Leonora and your child are absent. They will not be long."

Little Alice kissed her father. Leonora kissed her husband, and the two departed on their sacred emission. Kendrake and his foster brother watched the lady's noble figure till she and the child were out of sight.

"I was glad to find you here, Jack," Lord Sydney said; "your face seemed like a welcome back to home; but you are changed."

The forest-keeper rose, and turned his swarthy face away; his

stalwart, powerful frame shook with a momentary emotion.

- "Not without cause," he said-"not without cause."
- "Where is your sister?"
- "Poor Loo—poor little Loo. She is at rest over there—quiet and out of her misery. John Kendrake drew a long deep breath, and pointed to the quiet graveyard, shadowed by the village church.
 - "Come with me, Sydney, and look here."

He led the way into another chamber, and Sydney saw a finelimbed, handsome boy lying on the bed, and sleeping tranquilly —one round arm thrown with a child's careless grace beneath his head, pillowed his rosy cheek, and there he slumbered innocent and happy.

"That's what she left me," said the forest-keeper, bending over the boy with quite a father's love. "It was her last gift, Lord Sydney—the token of her passion, her sorrow, and her shame."

Tears dropped upon the boy's soft cheek. They fell from eyes that rarely wept, but old time memories were upon John Kendrake that night.

"The lad would bear a noble name," said the keeper, gazing at the child, "but for the dark cloud on his birth."

"Is it so?" said Sydney, pityingly; "is the mark of Ishmael upon him?"

"Ay; you have spoken his name. He is by his father's sin one who may not bear his father's name, and must disgrace his mother's—one of the world's outcasts, Sydney—a child who has no home or place by right of parentage, but he may win both. Is he not handsome?"

"A splendid little fellow."

"With the beauty of his mother upon his brow, and the patrician blood of his sire in his veins; but for the oath that chained me back, kept me from going forth a hunter on the destroyer's track, that sire's blood should have washed out the sin. It's twelve years ago nearly—twelve years ago."

"Since what?"

"Since he came here—a delicate, slim youth, whom I could have crushed with one single grip—a boyish debauchee—a stripling roue. He had the devilish beauty and the pitiless soul of his race, but he could dissemble. And my sister—poor unconscious girl—poor Loo! It's the old, old wretched story, Sydney, as old as miserable, and only new in the desolation it causes."

"Tell it," said Sydney, with sympathetic quietude.

"You know how I loved the girl—my sister; pet and playmate. We had the cottage, the house, and a bit of land Lord Ewrick gave us before he went away, and left Charnett to your father. It was a pretty place. I was only under-keeper then—only under-keeper." He laughed bitterly. "I was John Kendrake, with an honest Saxon name, and a sister who was all a girl could be. I watched her, loved her, taught her all you had taught me. We read and studied out of the books you gave me, and I was never so happy as when at home teaching my pretty scholar her lessons. Then he came."

"Who?"

"His name I cannot tell yet. He did not stay in Charnett long, but he made my acquaintance somehow. I felt honored, blind, pitiful fool that I was. He praised my skill, went with me very often over the shooting-grounds and often accompanied me home.

"Had I thought of his intention," said John Kendrake, looking at his gun, "I would have sent a bullet through his brain with less remorse than I would break a pheasant's wing; but I suspected nothing, he seemed a boy merely who took a boy's delight in sharing our simple pleasures, so I thought no harm until he left.

"Then," the fierce glance swept down the long gun-barrel again, "then Loo forgot to smile, ceased to care for her lessons, grew pale and sad. I wondered why, but there were quicker eyes than mine, and busy tongues were soon at work.

Her name became a whispered by-word in the village. She could not leave the cottage, but shut herself alone with her misery and me. I never uttered one reproach, thank Heaven; I did not make her lot more bitter than it was. I was kinder, gentler; but the worst came—Ishmael was born!

"I knew the wronger—he had ruined her and killed her. I saw her fading away before me, dying day by day; it was a touching thing to see the light of life sink down, while she sat with her wistful face at the cottage window, and the baby in her lap, watching and waiting until she died."

"Poor Jack, you have seen trouble too."

"I could not hate the child; she put him into my arms and besought me to love him for her sake. What could I do? He was sinless, innocent of wrong, unconscious of the dark brand on his birth, the shadow it brought upon our hearth—I swore to cherish and protect him always."

"But the father—the wronger?"

"Him I had sworn to seek and slay." The tear-drops that had come were now scorched dry by the lurid fire burning in the speaker's eyes. "But she made me promise not to do him violence, never to raise my hand against him."

"And did you, Jack?"

"I did; but, kneeling on her grave, I swore to have full vengeance, though my own hand dared not take it."

"It was hard to give that promise; the wrong was great, and the wish for revenge must have been strong."

"It preyed upon the very fibers of my heart; I could not rest or sleep; I felt no hunger, knew no fatigue; but, like a famished wolf, tireless and fierce, I wandered forth with the boy. Where I went I knew not, I was mad; yet I tended Ishmael carefully, heeded his slightest cry. I wanted to be away, anywhere, anywhere out of sight, to leave the accursed spot behind me.

"But I could not go. I watched the cottage when poor Loo was gone. Dawn, sunset, and night saw me outside. I clung to the boy till some woman from the hall, who had been kind.

to Loo through the whole time of her trouble, took him from

"Then, one night, when a wild storm raged in the sky, I kindled a brand and set fire to the home whose hearth was sullied forever while it stood. I saw the pyre blaze till nothing remained but a heap of blackened ashes—a ruin, a waste spot.

"And I trod the ashes into dust, I crumbled them in my hand, scattered them to the winds, and as they scattered, swore to have the retribution I had planned—it is more slow, more sure and terrible than a death dealt by me—and it will be done."

The swarthy face was full of stern resolve, burning with the rude, rugged poetry of thought that had prompted him to make a pyre of the sullied home.

"That is my story," he said, abruptly. "I wonder why I thought of it to-night, unless it is that the sight of you recalled the past. Poor little Loo, it was hard to lose her so, was it not?"

- "Very hard, Jack. You know my story, and will see its end; I wish I could shake off that presentiment."
 - "I have upset you; I ought to have known better."
- "Nay, we are brothers in sympathy at heart, you were always true and faithful to me."
 - "Always, Sydney; I would die for you."
- "I know it, Jack, and ever call me Sydney; let there be no lord or master between us; if there is a superiority you have it," he added, with a melancholy smile, "for you are a powerful fellow, in the meridian of leonine strength, and I am a sickly invalid, whose days are numbered."
 - "Don't give way, Sydney."
- "I do not; I am not afraid to die, Jack. I have lived on with one hope—to see my father, feel one last kind clasp of his hand, hear him revoke his awful curse and his prophetic wish. I want no more. I can leave the rest to you."

[&]quot;To me?"

[&]quot;When I am gone," said Lord Sydney, solemnly, "Leonora

I our child will be friendless but for you. I know the world well, Jack, that I would not trust them to its mercy."

'They shall have my devotion to the death," John Kendrake 1; "and woe to him or any one who would seek to injure m."

'You remember," said the invalid, leaning on the keeper's ulder, as though his own fragile nature drew sustenance from ndrake's strength, "how when we were boys we promised to true each to the other."

"As we were, Sydney."

"And then I had no thought of such an occasion or a time e this; but now that it has come I feel assured that I need re no misgiving. You will make Leonora and the child your e."

The forest-keeper gazed earnestly into his foster-brother's intenance. He wanted to see how much of the sad presentint of death grew from imagination over-wrought—how much w from a stern conviction that the end was near. There was denial of the painful truth—the white shadow was there. e features, pure and colorless as marble, were marked with fatal sign.

"Life is very sweet to me," he said, watching the change in ndrake's countenance, and reading therein the keeper's right. "I do not willingly give up all hope, but to cling h despairing hopelessness to a delusive fight against the truth the last were to be weak. I know my doom."

He dropped his voice to a whisper.

"The disease is here, in my heart's core, a cureless malady.

ave lived longer than I thought to live—longer than I should

we lived but for Leonora's love and the new life tendrils

ought with little Alice."

"You have them still—the Lady Leonora and little Alice."

"Listen, Jack. I have said life is very sweet to me; but if fond, mad hope I waste what there is left, I should be cowlly and criminal. Whatever may occur to-night—whether

my father sends for me to forgive me, or whether I go hence still accursed, I would still confide the same charge to you. Will you accept the trust? Guard my wife and child be their friend—protector."

"I have said it, Sydney."

"It is a sacred task. I would not give it to a man less true. You know how lust of gold, ambitious greed, and passion's prompting, change man's nature. Should I be forgiven, the inheritance will revert to my wife and child. And there will be but one frail life—a child's—between the rich estate of Charnett and any who may covet it."

"If you were dying, as you fear, Sydney, my brother, you might go in peace, leaving them to me."

"So I believe, but swear it."

The sun had sunk now. Dark clouds were gathering in somber depth above, and the first pale stars were twinkling over Charnett's hills.

The forest-keeper and his foster-brother stood face to face, each looking at the other, as men look when the soul is in the eye.

"Here as we are, with the evening skies above us, your hand in mine and mine in yours," John Kendrake said. "I swear it solemnly, by the old affection and the brotherhood between us, by your love and by your sorrow, by every sacred tie of home and faith, to guard the Lady Leonora and little Alice. To stand between them and the world, to be their shield against treachery and danger, to be their faithful friend with a devotion never changing, never dying, shall be John Kendrake's destiny. Now, so help me Heaven, it is sworn."

"I am content," Lord Sydney said; "more than content. I do feel happier now than I have been for many a day. My father's curse sank deeply in my soul, and not all the love of my wife and child could bring forgetfulness."

Sydney sank into a seat, resting his brow upon his slender hand.

- "Here, in this pocket-book," he said, producing one, "are proofs of our marriage. It took place in France, at Versailles; they may be wanted to prove Leonora's identity. Take care of them, for her sake."
- "Nay, you are her guardian yet. Keep them. I will take them at the fitting time."
 - "So be it. You think I shall be forgiven, Jack."

The fear that his sire might die and leave him unforgiven haunted him.

- "I am sure of it."
- "I wish Leonora would come back; she has been a long time gone."
 - "Not very long."
 - "But night has come now, and she went before the sun set."
- "The sun was setting, Sydney. It is more than a mile each way, and her interview with the earl may be protracted."

A horseman rode rapidly past the lodge, and as he passed, called out:

"John Kendrake, you are wanted at the hall; go quickly, and take the——"

The rest was indistinct. The rider went from sight like a meteor, and spurred swiftly up the village road.

- "Who was that?" asked Sydney.
- "Stephen Lester, the steward; he was the forest-keeper."
- "He is changed. I had forgotten him. What did he say?"
- "That I am wanted at the hall. I caught no more distinctly, but I think he said, 'Take the stranger with you.'"
 - "That would mean me."
- "It would. Come! The earl has forgiven you, and sent a swifter messenger than Leonora. It must be so—come!"
- "No; she would have come back. I will wait for her. Lose no time, Jack. If my father wants to see me, you return and tell me so."
 - "But the time will be lost."
 - "I have waited so long that I can wait a little longer rather

than go in doubt and come back in worse despair. Go!"

The keeper saw it would be useless to persuade his foster-brother further, so he took his gun and went. He did not want the weapon, but he took it by the force of habit.

"Hope!" he said, turning at the door to once more clasp Lord Sydney's hand. "I shall return to take you to your father before yonder cloud has passed the hills."

He was gone. Lord Sydney stood on the threshold of the lodge to look after the stalwart form striding onward. It went from his view, but reappeared at an ascending turn in the avenue.

The keeper looked back and waved his hand. Lord Sydney raised his in reply. Another moment, and John Kendrake was again lost to sight.

The disinherited turned his glance toward the heavy cloud drifting slowly over the forest trees. It took a weird, fantastic shape, and to his fancy looked not unlike a funeral cavalcade, with sable horses and sable plumes.

"Shall I be forgiven?" he mused. "Shall I once more stand by my father's side, hear him call me Sydney, as he used, see the look of love that was ever mine until the day came when he cursed me?"

He sighed sadly at the recollection; but there was no reproach in the pallid, classic face upturned toward the stars.

"It was an awful curse," he said, mournfully, "and I wish I could forget it; but the words that then rang in my ears now re-echo within me. To think that he should ask Heaven to witness such a prayer!—that if ever I came back to Charnett I should die before I set foot on the threshold of his door!—that the turf of this, my nation place, my home, should run red with my blood!"

Lord Sydney shivered as he looked at the green sward; the starlight went from it suddenly, obscured by a shadow that shut out sight of home—shut out sight of landscape, sky, and Charnett's noble range of hills.

The disinherited lifted his eyes to see whence came this darkness. He did not think when he saw the man before him that it was his death shadow which had come.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE QUIET AFTER SUNSET.

The story told by the driver of the Charnett coach to the curious passenger who rode by his side was quite as true as were his remarks upon it. The voice of nature will make itself heard in spite of pride.

The proud old Earl of Charnett, now stretched upon his dying bed, had often bitterly repented the intemperate wrath that made him send his son away; for the boy's worst and only fault he had the best and oldest plea to put forth in palliation.

When Sydney was gone—an outcast, disinherited, deprived of rank and name—the earl tried to think himself injured beyond reparation. He had not sought the separation—so he argued; he had but justly punished the boy for his disobedience.

Yet the quiet, inward voice of conscience would rise and ask whether Sydney had deserved a sire's curse, and the wish that, coming from a sire's lips, was in its nature so appalling.

One dark thought would come, though the old man strove hard to shut it away. What if that wish were to prove prophetic? What if Heaven were to grant the impious prayer that if Lord Sydney came back to Charnett, he would die before his foot could cross the threshold of the roof under which he was born? What if his blood ran red upon the soil of his native home?

Earl Robert reflected on this sometimes. The awful wish made itself into a phantom, and haunted him.

And he had hurled the malediction only because his son ebeved the dictates of an honorable love, and, in defiance of

society, married one whose profession made the union a mesal-liance.

Even those who joined with Earl Robert in blaming Sydney most sincerely, could not but acknowledge there was strong temptation. The lady was beautiful, her character spotless. The power of her genius and her virtues had been trumpeted throughout the world.

The proud old man excused his own conduct by thinking he had done no more than the duty due to ancestry, rank, and position. But there was something else of which he was made aware as time wore on—the duty of a father to himself and to his son.

A word, a single line in writing, would have brought the boy for whom he often longed in secret, but the old man could not subdue the stubborn sin. Yet the incessant struggle told at last upon him. It fretted at his soul and wore existence out.

He lay there in the quiet chamber, sinking day by day, and with the setting of each sun the unspoken wish for Sydney grew stronger.

It wanted but a voice to urge a plea on behalf of the disinherited.

The earl would have been grateful for the chance of being prevailed upon to yield.

But those who would have gladly intruded, dared not, and those who might have used the privilege, would not.

One man there was in the household who had power above the rest. This was Stephen Lester, the steward.

He was apparently upon singularly familiar terms with Charnett's haughty master. He could say what he liked without fear, and from the commencement of the earl's illness Lester acted for him in all things.

As a matter of course, he was no favorite with the humbler servants. They were jealous of his sudden rise and absolute authority.

James Bingham, the stud-groom, was the only one who ever

presumed to question the steward's commands. An old rivalry existed between the two, though Bingham had always been the subordinate.

They had only quarreled once since Sydney's absence, though they had quarreled frequently before. On the last occasion, Lester threatened the groom with dismissal, but he did not repeat the threat.

Bingham laughed in his face, took him aside, and whispered a few words in his ear. The steward turned pale—a savage white, as one who saw the scene described it—but ever after that he avoided an altercation.

That Bingham held some power was evident.

When Leonora, with her child, left the lodge to proceed upon the holy mission, she went direct to Charnett Hall.

A woman, however gentle and timid in herself and in her own cause, can be very brave for the sake of one she loves.

The lady was perfectly aware that when her husband was exiled from home on her account, his father gave strict orders that all messengers from Sydney or herself should be refused access to him. Leonora did not heed that now—she had a sacred duty to perform.

Yet her heart's pulsations quickened as her hand lifted the muffled knocker, and for a moment she could not speak to the servant who appeared at the door.

The weakness passed, her voice was firm as she stated her desire.

"I will speak to Mr. Lester," said the man, respectfully. "Shall I give your name, please?"

"I am Lord Sydney's wife," she said, quietly, "and I have a message from my husband to his father."

The menial bowed low, as he retired. Leonora had not to wait long before Stephen Lester appeared.

She looked at him intently through her vail. He was a tall and portly man of middle age, and his countenance wore a

hard, stern expression; it was in some degree a handsome face, but marred by deep lines of lurking craft.

"You wish to see his lordship?" he said, in a cool, decisive tone, not entirely without an involuntary deference forced from him by her queenly aspect.

"I do."

"Yet, madam, you cannot but be aware that the nature of his lordship's instructions forbid me to make your request known."

"I must see him," said Leonora, with a calm resolve, for her spirit rose instinctively against the man; "take me to his chamber."

'I cannot; madam—I dare not."

Her resolution seemed to make him ill at ease.

"Then I will find the way," she said, "and so you will not have the risk of any consequence likely to arise from an act of disobedience on your part."

"Madam," he said, respectfully, but with determination, "I must do my duty. I trust you will exonerate me if I persist in it, but the earl is in a dangerous state, and a sudden shock would prove fatal."

"I come from Lord Sydney," she said, pleadingly. "I bring a message—a prayer from a son who may be dying, to a dying father. You will not stay me."

"Pardon me, madam, I must do my duty."

He stood before her, barred her way, and held his ground in spite of the haughty gesture that followed her appeal.

"Is there no one to help me?" she asked half-aloud, while little Alice stood clinging to her hand, "none of all who knew and loved Lord Sydney to intercede for him?"

At this instant, James Bingham crossed the hall; he heard the speaker's voice, and recognized her as she raised her vail.

Leonora turned to him hopefully; she knew him as a faithful servant to her husband.

"You, "she said-"you will help me?"

The stud-groom looked from one to the other, and by the attitude of each seemed to read what had passed; he bent his head very low to Leonora. Then he placed his strong hand heavily on Lester's shoulder, and said:

- "Stand aside!"
- "James Bingham!" exclaimed the steward. "You know as well as I what his lordship's orders are."
 - " What ?"
- "That this lady, Lord Sydney's wife, must not be admitted."

 The groom did not stay to argue, his hand going from Lester's shoulder to his breast, forced him back.
- "Stephen Lester." he said, gazing at him steadily, "her ladyship shall see my master. I say it, and will take her to him."

The steward gnashed his teeth.

- "At your peril, Bingham."
- "Interrupt her at yours! Back—a step to stop her, and—"

The motion of his muscular arm raised in menace finished the sentence.

Had Stephen Lester moved he would have been stricken to the floor.

"Now follow me, my lady," Bingham said, while the steward, with a savage whiteness on his face, stood still in impotent rage. "Let Stephen Lester say what he may, the earl shall see Lord Sydney's messenger."

Leonora followed him gratefully. He led her to a chamber, and opened the door softly; as he was retiring Leonora gave him her hand.

- "I cannot thank you now," she murmured.
- "I want no thanks. I could do more than what I have done for Master Sydney."

He touched the soft gloved hand with reverence and retired.

"One faithful heart," thought Leonora, as she entered the sick chamber, "all is not lost yet."

The physician who was by the bedside put up his finger to his lip enjoining silence. Earl Charnett had been sleeping, but

low as were the voices outside the door, and noiselessly as the lady stole over the carpet, he awoke.

An expression changing from surprise to recognition, then to pleasure, swept over the patrician's face, round which the long white hair fell as he started from the pillow and outstretched both his hands.

"He has come," he said, eagerly, "he has come—my son—Sydney—I knew he would."

Leonora knelt by the bedside with a cry of joy. Earl Charnett motioned the physician away, and placed his hand caressingly on Leonora's head.

Pride was all subdued now. The unexpected advent of his son's wife and child brought back every association so hallowed in the past. The one thought was for Sydney—to forgive him and recall the curse.

"I do not wonder that he disobeyed me," he said, gazing kindly at the beautiful creature who knelt there with Alice. "The sin was mine not to forgive him."

"Then he is forgiven—oh, thank Heaven! It will be life to him. Let me go for him. He would not come, my lord; he is too proud to be sent back again."

"My poor boy—poor Sydney! I have repented a thousand times. I would to Heaven you had come before."

Leonora echoed the wish most fervently. She was a proud woman—proud as the old man lying there before her—and her proudest sense had been hurt by his injustice to the man she loved; but in that moment, when the earl spoke of forgiveness, she wept with very joy, thinking of the glad tidings she would have to tell Lord Sydney.

"Let me fetch him," she said; "let him know his happiness. My lord, my father, it has been his dearest dream that such an hour should come. He cannot know his happiness too soon."

"Nor can I; but I must not lose you again. He shall find you here; it is your place, and I have quicker messengers. That bell."

It stood on the table near. Leonora touched it, and the metallic note struck by its silver tongue had not ceased to vibrate when an attendant came.

It was Stephen Lester. Whatever evil thoughts were in his mind he kept them down. Nothing appeared in eye, on lip, or brow but the respectful, quiet solicitude of a devoted servant for his master.

"My lord," he said, and waited.

"Mr. Lester, come here. This is my daughter, wife of my only son, and he is coming home. I know that gives you pleasure, Lester—does it not?"

"The deepest, my lord. There is not a servant in the house but will welcome him gladly."

"There, my child," said the earl to Leonora, "they have not forgotten him, in spite of their master's anger. Haste, take horse, and go for him; he is—where, my child, where? I know he is near, but this has come so suddenly upon me that I had forgotten to ask where."

"At the keeper's lodge, with his foster-brother, John Kendrake."

"Then haste, good Lester, ride hard, and tell John Kendrake to bring his master here, for Sydney is master now. Thank Heaven, it is not too late. I have been afraid to repent, and do justice. Go, good Lester, send them both here, and then ride on for Reuben Uxley. I shall want him to-night."

He sank back on the pillow here. The intense excitement was too much for him, and a red foam came to his lips.

Leonora ran to the balcony. The physician, who knew the imminent danger of his patient, had gone no farther, and he came immediately in answer to her word.

Not ten seconds had elapsed. The heavy curtains had scarcely time to fall behind Leonora ere they were parted again as she re-entered with the doctor. Yet there was time for something to be done.

A minute globule dropped from the steward's finger into a

glass of medicine that stood ready for the patient. The tiny atom melted as it touched the liquid.

Leonora found Stephen Lester bending over the earl with much concern. The doctor's countenance was very grave. He glanced at Earl Charnett's pallid face. He placed his fingers on the low, faint pulse.

"Lady," he said, solemnly, "if there is aught to be done—peace to be made with Heaven or man—let no time be lost."

Leonora grasped Lester's wrist and whispered one word:

"Go !"

He understood her, cast one hurried glance at his master, and went to ride for Lord Sydney and Reuben Uxley.

"Is it so near?" asked the lady.

"It will be ended before dawn," was the reply. "Hush, now. Say nothing to disturb or to excite him. This draught may give him strength for some few hours to come."

Quite innocent of what had been done to the draught, he administered it, while Leonora supported the sick man's head. He breathed heavily and unclosed his eyes.

"Hamilton," he said, with a smile, "I am better; I am sure of it. My son is coming; not all your medicine can give me such strength as will one look at him. But you are sad. Is it——"

Interpreting the sympathetic sorrow in the doctor's gaze, he said no more. The hope faded with a single sharp, short pang, and resignation came.

"Well," he said, lowly, "Heaven has been merciful in sparing me so long. I shall see my son, take from his head the bitter, sinful curse, and give him my tenderest blessing. I always loved him, Hamilton, but the stubborn pride born in me made me stern. Tell me, doctor, the truth. Think you, for I have no fear now, shall I have time?"

"To make peace above, to see Lord Sydney here?—yes;

[&]quot;Say it; he must come quickly."

Doctor Hamilton bowed his head.

Earl Charnett breathed an earnest, silent prayer—he knew the worst.

"My child," he said to Leonora, "give me your little one. Come, darling, closely—so. I cursed your father, but here, by this kiss, the cruel curse and impious wish that went up from my tongue are revoked in my inmost soul. Tell him so, my child, if—if he should come too late."

Little Alice, wondering at what she saw, but with a child's sweet instinct for affection, understanding the old man's love, nestled down to him.

"Would I had a few years of the past to live again," he said; "a few years that did seem so long in passing, but now, as I look back upon them, seem but days. My love for Sydney should be so proved that he should quite forget I had been unkind. He is coming, though, at last. It's not far to the lodge. Has the sun gone down?"

The physician drew the curtains aside.

"I see it has. How beautiful the old hills look with the deep red glow behind them! Open the curtains wide; don't light the lamp; let me see my old home by the starlit skies only. And Sydney—Sydney. Doctor, I cannot see; is this sleep or death?"

"Sleep," said the doctor, holding his patient's wrist; "it is exhaustion, nothing more."

"I shall wake again?"

"When the faintness is gone."

"Thank Heaven!—to see Sydney. My child."

"My father."

"Don't leave me. You seem like part of Sydney. The tie is hallowed, for those who love each other grow alike; I trace a tone of his voice in yours, a look of his in your face. My poor girl, I was unkind to you."

Leonora kissed him reverently, and rested her cheek lightly

"This little one," he said, struggling to overcome the lethargy creeping upon him, "what is her name?"

"Alice"

"It was his mother's. That was a tender thought, to keep his mother's name in spite of his father's anger. Alice; and she is like Sydney, fair and gentle, with such silken, amber tresses as I can remember he had in childhood. Alice, Sydney, and you—all my children. The old man will not die alone after all."

His voice grew faint and fainter yet, till it sank into a .whisper.

"Doctor," he said, and Hamilton bent low to catch the sound, "bear witness to this. Sydney is Lord of Charnett. I leave all to him and his—my children here, his wife, and little ones. And—and—you are sure I shall wake again?"

"When you have rested, and the sooner if you sleep now."

"My old friend would not deceive me—would not. To wake, wake—not die. Sydney—Alice. A tender thought. Alice, his mother's name. Sydney—coming, coming."

Then the whisper sighed out, too. He slept, leaving much unspoken. He made an effort to point at something in the chamber; a heavy cabinet they thought it was, but his arm fell, and kept them in doubt.

And so in the quiet of the sunset he slumbered, with Leonora watching him, and little Alice by his side. The star that Sydney saw from the lodge was twinkling on, and the cloud that drifted slowly over Charnett's hill loomed above the group, the dying sleeper, and the quiet watchers waiting for the forgiven outcast to come.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED TRAIL ON THE SWARD.

It was after Stephen Lester rode past the keeper's lodge, and while Lord Sydney stood at the door alone waiting for his foster brother to return, that the steward, going up the village road, saw a stranger, who at his approach had evidently stopped to look at him.

Lester slackened pace involuntarily. The stranger was vaguely familiar to an extent that troubled him.

"Now, where have we met before?" the steward thought; "or have we never met, and is it fancy only?"

That it was not fancy was proved beyond a doubt by the first words the stranger uttered.

"You ride well, Stephen Lester, for a man of weight; and whatever may be upon your mind does not affect your habit."

And he laughed.

The laugh, cold, hard, and short, without mirth or music in it, was more familiar than the voice, and the steward reined in. The stranger placed his hand carelessly upon the bridle. Carelessly it seemed, but had the steward attempted to ride on, he would have found himself a captive for the time.

"I know you," he said, speaking lowly, and in his cheek there was the strange gray white that invariably came to him with any strong emotion.

"Why, yes, men of our kind do not forget each other easily; and some things there are that fix time, and place, and person in the memory—where were you going?"

"To fetch Reuben Uxley."

"Who is wanted by Earl Charnett. This may be a bad night's work for both of us, Stephen."

"Why?"

"That is right-try cheat and subterfuge. You cannot un-

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And so in the quiet of the sunset he sl watching him, and little Alice by his sid saw from the lodge was twinkling on, a slowly over Charnett's hill loomed ab leoner, and the quiet watchers waiting

derstand. The earl will reinstate Lord Sydney, and you have nothing to fear. It will not be difficult to render a just account of the Charnett stewardship."

They were walking slowly toward the lawyer's house—no sounds to be heard save their own voices and the soft trample of the horse's feet—no human beings save themselves in sight.

These two men in that quiet country town could think their deviltry and hint dark sin without fear of being overheard; each was on his guard—neither could trust the other yet.

- "Would it not," asked the steward, with a desperate attempt at self-possession, "be better, Michael Ewrick, to be frank?"
- "How frank? I think I give promise of sufficient candor. You seek to hide your thought."
- "Meeting you here has so surprised me that I have no thought yet."
- "Come," said Michael Ewrick, "we make progress. You have spoken a bit of truth, I will add a morsel to it; you never expected to see me here again; my appearance may possibly be inimical to your interests."

"How should it?"

The steward confined himself to questions up to this time; he did not like to venture out of his mental depth.

- "How should it?" echoed the other; "we are cautious. Suppose we put it in this wise—there is a steward to a rich estate, whose master having disinherited the heir, and being sick to apathy, does not demand a strict rendering of accounts. The revenue is vast, limitless almost; the steward has authority, power—his position must be lucrative."
 - "Well?"
- "Then the disinherited returns, to be forgiven—it would be awkward now were he to ask a rendering of the account neglected by his father."
- "Very awkward, indeed; as awkward as it would be to Michael Ewrick were the old man to live, undo what he has

done, destroy the will made in tavor of the nearest kinsman, and reinstate the son."

The speaker looked at Michael with dark significance, and Ewrick said, reflectively:

- "Were the old man to live-what does that mean?"
- "This—not half an hour ago the physician said, that if the earl had aught to do, peace to make with Heaven or man, it must be done quickly; he will not see the dawn."
 - " Ha!"
- "And then," added Stephen Lester, in a tone whose peculiar meaning could scarcely be mistaken, "the physician, though a very skillful gentleman, did not know exactly how bad his patient was."
- "Is there a chance then," asked Michael, and sinister eye met eye as sinister, "that death will come before the work is done?"
- "Before all is finished; but something is done already; the Lady Leonora——"

Michael caught the name, and said it under his breath—he spoke it in a whisper, quivering with intense passion.

- "Leonora?"
- "And her child-"
- "Her child and his—malediction on him—would I could curse him with blight of death."

He broke from this strain abruptly, and said between his teeth: "Well—Leonora and her child?"

"Are by the earl's bedside—reconciled. I was dispatched to send Lord Sydney and his foster-brother there. I gave the message, and they are doubtless on the way."

Ewrick turned the fierce light of his large black orbs in the direction of the lodge. He saw the forest-keeper's stalwart form striding on toward the house.

- "John Kendrake-unaccompanied," he said.
- "Then they misunderstood my message. I gave it as I rode past, and they, perhaps, only heard one name."

- "Kendrake's?"
- "It must have been so."
- "Then he—Sydney," hissed Michael, "is at the lodge—alone."

"Where he will wait till Kendrake returns to him."

Ewrick's hand went with nervous indecision to his breast—to something hidden there. He hesitated—irresolute between an intent respecting Sydney, and a desire to hear more from Stephen Lester.

"Lester," he said at length, with his hand closed like steel over the hand of him to whom he spoke, "if we understand each other, as I think we do, this night's work may do much."

The steward did not speak, but he wore the aspect of one who would take action with the other. He waited for further confidence from his more daring confederate—the man whose brain had greater scope, whose will leaped beyond control or fear.

- "We know the past," Michael said; "a single glance into the black retrospect, and each has an insight into the other's soul core. My former visit, Lester, you remember it?"
- "How you came, how you went, what passed while you were here. I remember all."
- "The bitter stigma that the proud old man, now dying yonder, fixed on me. The smirch—the blot he threw upon my mother's memory—the outrage cast upon her grave."
 - "I remember, too, that he gave you money and pity."
- "S'death! No word of it again; the recollection brings a hot sweat to my brow. I do believe he knew her right and mine, even when he dared to say his pitiful doubt. I could have got the proof, but on the very night I went for it the church was fired. I have sometimes thought he had a hand in that."
- "Not unlikely," said Lester, very pale; "the Charnetts are a strange race."
 - "And he did not love my father too well."

- "No better," said Stephen, "than your father loved him who died."
- "Ay, the secret of that tragic deed gave you the place and power you hold. They said my sire killed him."
 - "So he did."
- "You lie!" said Michael, with a lurid flash of the eye. "They met to fight a duel, the forest-keeper was their only witness; he loaded their weapons. Now, on your oath, your salvation—did he not leave one pistol empty?"

The steward became livid to the lips.

- "I swear-," he began.
- "So would Satan to a perjury. I had it from my father when he died—the truth. There was but one ball, and that one ball he missed with. The bullet which went through my uncle's head was fired from the keeper's gun, and the keeper's name was Stephen Lester."

The steward reeled in the saddle, his conscience-stricken look admitted that the accusation was but truth.

- "You need not fear," said Ewrick, sneering at the other's want of nerve. "I have much of the Charnett blood in me, and shall not be likely to weep over my kith and kin. The race is dying out, Stephen."
- "The earl and his son, Lord Sydney, are the only direct representatives; but then there is the girl."

The steward spoke more calmly now. Michael's manner told him he had nothing to dread.

- "We can look upon the earl as dead, Lester?"
- "I have told you the physician's opinion."
- "And Sydney is delicate—very. I should be in no way surprised were he not to survive his father."

The looks that passed between the two were diabolical. Stephen Lester shivered slightly—he had not hardened into iron vet.

"I should be very sorry were anything to happen suddenly," he said.

- "You would have more cause for sorrow were something not to happen now. Lord Sydney has his own solicitors, who might require an account of stewardship more strict than you are perhaps prepared with. They would be more difficult to deal with than our friend Uxley."
 - "I do not much fear on that score, Michael Ewrick."
- "No; but if we disagree you may regret it; my duty is to avenge my uncle's death, clear my father's name of the stigma that rests upon it—people call him fratricide."
 - "So in intent he was."
- "Yes," said Michael, with cool and deadly menace, "but not in act; we cannot hang a man for intention, we can for murder."

The steward's hand tightened on his heavy riding-whip. Ewrick saw with what dark thought he scanned the lonely scene.

- "Go," he said, laughing now in scorn, "do your mission, Stephen—take Reuben Uxley to your master. Should he be too late, so much the better."
 - "Shall I see you again to-night?"
- "Perhaps; soon, at all events. One question—what has become of Simon McDonald?"
 - "The poacher?" said Lester, with a start.
- "The convict—the fugitive—the—no matter what. Where is he?"
- "He has the old hut on the heath yonder, and it is said he is half mad; he lives in a semi-savage state. Earl Robert suffers him to roam at will over the estate, and shoot what game he may require for subsistence."
- "Earl Robert is a generous master to those who serve him. So am I."

Lester rode forward. He seemed to see an unpleasant significance in the other's words.

"We shall understand each other better soon," he said.

Michael, who was striding on in the opposite direction, paused, looked back, and said:

"We shall."

So they parted for the time; each went his way—each with a savage hatred of the other, but with a knowledge that each was necessary to the other's purpose.

"If I could fear," said Michael to himself, "I should dread Stephen Lester; he is the kind of man who would strike in the dark; but he will not touch me; we shall be accomplices, slave and master."

He went thoughtfully in the direction of the forest-keeper's lodge, with his eyes bent on the ground, and one hand in his breast. The handsome face wore a quiet but a very sinister look.

John Kendrake had not yet returned. When he reached Charnett House he found Bingham in waiting at the door.

"Where is Lord Sydney?" asked the groom, anxiously.

"Then he was sent for?" said Kendrake. "Thank Heaven for that. I told him so, but he would not come till all was sure."

"Was sent for," repeated Bingham. "I would not for the world have his father wake and find him not here—run back for him, Kendrake."

"Hush!"

A light footfall sounded on the stairs—the dark glory of Leonora's face looked upon them from above.

"Where is my husband?" she whispered. "Did not the steward give his message?"

The keeper answered in a voice subdued with a strange fear.

"We heard the message, but not distinctly. Lord Sydney would not come till all was sure."

Leonora clasped her hands.

"Haste back and bring him; stay—the earl heard you arrive and expects to see you."

"But I had better go for-"

"No; come first and explain the cause of this delay."

The keeper dropped his gun into Bingham's hand, uncovered

THE RED TRAIL ON THE SWARD.

his head, and ascended the stairs. He followed Leonora with reverent quietude.

Robert Lois, Earl of Charnett, was awake now, and still had little Alice beside him.

A shade of regretful disappointment crossed the physician's countenance when he saw Kendrake enter without his foster-brother.

"My son," said the dying man, eagerly.

Then he sank back, saying, in fretful despair:

"Why, Kendrake, you are alone."

"My lord," said Kendrake, approaching, "your son is coming. The steward went past so rapidly that we did not catch his message clearly."

"And Sydney?"

"Has been so long away, and yearned so deeply to return, that he could not risk the faintest chance of broken hope."

"Poor boy, forgiveness seems so strange he cannot believe it. Tell him to come now, John—tell him to come."

The keeper waited to hear no more; he saw by the gray shadow creeping over Earl Charnett's face that no time must be lost. He made the descent of the staircase at two leaps, and, taking his gun from Bingham, ran homeward.

"It seems as if he never will come," said the earl to Leonora.

A fear, akin to that which had subdued Kendrake's voice, stole into Leonora's heart.

"It was the dread that he might be denied—only that; but he will not be long now."

"I know, I know, he could not forget the curse. I wish it never had been spoken; to have recalled it does not seem enough. He has suffered much, my child."

"Very much."

"I have suffered, too. I should have lived longer and more happily if I had not sent Sydney away. Doctor?"

"My lord."

"Help me to perform what will be wanted to give him his inheritance. Open that cabinet—there are two wills; one in that book—the Charnett records. Have you found it?"

"I have."

"Let it be destroyed when Uxley comes—you witness its destruction. It gives my son's true heritage to another, our next of kindred. Let it be destroyed."

"It shall be done."

"In Uxley's presence, and before John Kendrake. The other—the other is there, behind the cabinet. Slide back that metal inlet on the hinge, then you see a crevice. I hid the will there in case a time like this should come."

Doctor Hamilton hastened to obey. He did not clearly comprehend his task.

The heavy cabinet was a fixture. Nothing stood behind it but the oaken-paneled wall. The hinge to which the earl alluded was on the cabinet's lid. No metal inlet was visible, but by trying in various ways, the doctor touched upon the secret. The slide went back of its own accord, and a narrow crevice in the wall was revealed.

Earl Robert uttered a joyous exclamation.

"That is it—the will. It gives all to Sydney when I have altered the codicil. It concerns one who says he is my brother Ewrick's son. The Charnetts have sinned much, and should be merciful. I would do him justice—confess—."

He paused abruptly.

"Confess nothing, except to Sydney. He will do justice; he----"

The echoes of a sharp report rang through the still air, and startled all; then came the echoes of another and a louder shot, and when they died away an unnatural silence followed.

Before Leonora or the doctor could think of staying him, Earl Robert leaped from his bed and to the window. They could see nothing. Lord Charnett saw with an inner sense of sight. The old man's aspect in his long, shroud-like night-robe, was as one inspired. He stood erect without assistance, and pointed down the star-lit slopes to the keeper's lodge.

Face, voice, and attitude were prophetic.

"There came a death-cry with the echoes," he said, "and I know who died. The curse—the wish; it was prophetic—prophetic!"

Leonora, whiter than the white robe she clutched at, uttered a thrilling cry:

"Father!"

"Hush, my daughter—I shall see him—they will bring him home."

She sank shuddering to her knees, but the old man did not move—he never turned his gaze from the lodge, and he seemed to see the tragedy that had been done there.

John Kendrake, when within a hundred yards of home, heard a pistol shot, and a short, piercing shriek—the cry of one death-stricken.

It struck his heart with terrible misgiving. He bounded on and saw a form run with the speed of thought out from the doorway toward the Charnett Heath.

The impulse and the act with Kendrake then were one—he aimed and fired, not without effect, for the fugitive staggered, reeled, but ran again

"Sydney," cried the keeper, fighting against his dread, "Sydney, my brother——"

Then he stood before the door, and his wild scream of agony rent the air.

The sire's curse—the impious wish, too late revoked, had taken the shape of prophecy. A track of blood ran red upon the sward. The outcast son of Charnett's master would never set foot now in Charnett's Hall.

Lord Sydney lay across the lodge threshold, dabbled in blood, shot through the head.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE EXILED SON WENT HOME

That was the sight John Kendrake witnessed. Such the spectacle that, like a swift and mighty horror, came suddenly upon him, and kept him for the moment stunned in stupor.

It was difficult to believe that the tragic deed, so appalling in its meaning and its magnitude at such a time, was a reality; but there the sad evidence lay in front of him—Lord Sydney, his foster-brother and Earl Charnett's son, stretched upon the threshold and the grass.

It was pitiful to look at him—pitiful to think of his fate; he had died within sight of the home from which he had been so long an exile. He had fallen there to rise no more, even while the messenger of gladness was on the way bringing a sire's forgiveness—the words the wanderer would have prized beyond all else. He had been dashed into eternity before he knew the happiness he had come to ask—he had died while father, wife, and child were waiting for him.

John Kendrake, kneeling with Sydney's head upon his knee, looked with sad bitterness into the plaintive face; the love he bore his foster-brother was felt with all the power of his strong Saxon nature. He could have wept, but not a tear would come; the tenderness of sorrow blended with a feeling that made his eyes lurid.

A lion crouching over a cub slain in its lair might have worn something of the aspect Kendrake wore as he gazed into the gloom of Charnett Heath—the assassin had gone that way.

He was hesitating between the wish to follow in pursuit and his reluctance to leave the body, when two horsemen rode to the gate. They were Reuben Uxley and the steward.

"Kendrake," called the latter, "is Lord Sydney with his father?"

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The keeper rose and pointed to the form at his feet.

"They will be together soon, Stephen Lester. Lord Sydney is here."

"Dead!" said the steward.

Lester had not expected Michael Ewrick would do the work so soon.

Reuben Uxley echoed the last words spoken, and both dismounted.

"Who could have done it?" Lester said, though not the remotest doubt existed in his own mind as to the perpetrator's identity. "This will be a sorrowful night's work for his father."

"And may accelerate the earl's own death," added Uxley, with deep remorse.

It was not in the nature of any one possessing a spark of human feeling to look unmoved upon the scene.

"Who shall tell him?" said the keeper, kneeling over him.
"Who shall say why it was done—what motive? whom had he wronged? He only came to-night."

"It's a bad piece of work, Kendrake; and you were much attached to him?"

"I! By Heaven, I could have given him my blood to the last drop, rather than this should be—his little child fatherless, his wife desolate, the old man dying, yet waiting expectant."

The brave fellow broke down huskily.

"It's a bullet wound, clearly," said Lester, scanning the orifice; "and that makes the matter strange"

"The work of some vagabond poacher," said Uxley, "who mistook the unfortunate gentleman for you, Kendrake."

The keeper shook his head.

"There's not a man in Charnett who would raise hand against me," he said; "and this is no poacher's work—it was a pistol-shot."

"How do you know?"

"By the sound of it; the assassin must have stood within a

foot of his victim when he fired—you see the powder has scorched his brow."

"Michael did not run the risk of missing," thought the steward.

Then conceiving a treacherous design, he said:

"Your gun is not loaded, Kendrake."

"No; I sent its contents after the murderer, and I hit him. It will be a mark to know him by when I meet him."

Reuben Uxley bit his lip uneasily.

- "Are you sure he was hit?"
- "Quite."
- "Where?"
- "Between the neck and shoulder. He will carry the mark to kir grave. Will you help me, gentlemen, to take Lord Sydney home? The old man cannot live long, and he should not die without looking upon his son."
- "Would it not be more merciful to let him leave this world in ignorance of his bereavement?" suggested the steward, with hypocritical concern. "He would, at least, die in hope."

John Kendrake could not decide; he glanced at the lawyer for advice.

"Take him home, by all means," said that gentleman, "and let him know the worst; it will be, as Mr. Kendrake said, a consolation, though a sad one, to suffer his father to look upon him."

"Right," said the keeper. "But first we will cleanse these fatal stains. I will do that; you, meanwhile, procure a hurdle."

Lester went to obey.

Kendrake passed into the inner room. Up to this time he had not thought of Ishmael.

Now, as he entered, another dread came over him. Through all the noise the boy had been silent; he could not have slept. Had the assassin, then, to make sure there should not be a witness, even a child, to recognize him in the future——

Kendrake could not finish the reflection. He sprang to the bed where he had left the boy sleeping.

Ishmael lay there still, but with a dark bruise on the forehead, the effect of a heavy blow with some blunt instrument, which had broken the skin and let a line of blood trickle slowly out.

He breathed heavily, but was not seriously hurt; a little attention served to revive him.

"I suppose he had not time to finish," thought Kendrake, grimly, as he kissed his sister's child. "Who did it, Ishmael?"

The boy said an incoherent something about a man with fierce eyes and a large beard.

From what Kendrake could gather, Ishmael had left his bed in terror at hearing angry voices, and entered the outer chamber in time to see the tragedy consummated.

Then the perpetrator had struck him with the empty pistol and flung him back upon the bed. That was all he knew.

"Walk across the room," the keeper said.

Ishmael obeyed; he showed no sign of weakness.

- "That will do. Are you strong enough to come with me to the house?"
- "Yes, papa," said the little fellow, bravely; "he did not hurt me much."
 - "Dress yourself, then; we must not leave you here alone."

The boy was ready by the time Kendrake had cleansed Sydney's head and face.

They then prepared a litter, and, covering the body with a blanket, bore it slowly home.

Ishmael followed, sitting on the steward's horse and holding the other.

The keeper took the head of the litter, Uxley and the steward took the foot, and so they carried the sorrowful burden to Charnett House.

Walking as they did with their faces bowed, they did not see the group then at the window of Earl Robert's chamber. They

did not hear Leonora's cry, but all were startled when they reached the door, for there stood the lady and the earl surrounded by a group of awe-stricken servants,

They set the hurdle down mechanically.

The father drew the blanket from the dead son's face, and as he did so, Hamilton, whose arm he grasped, felt him thrill through every vein.

No word of sorrow passed the old man's lips, only as he sank slowly down to Sydney's breast, he whispered hoarsely:

"I knew it-the curse, the prophecy has come home to me."

Then the aged form straightened out and grew rigid by Sydney's side; the father laid his cold cheek to the scarcely colder tace of his son.

No murmur now, no word, no look, nothing but a convulsive tremor of one arm lying on Sydney's neck, and then the hurdle bore a double burden.

Sire and child, sundered so long in life, were dead together.

Leonora had not spoken. She had waited so long in expectant horror that when the hideous truth was before her, it could do no more than magnetize her faculties into helpless dumbness. Her beautiful face touched all by its mute despair. In her utter desolation she stood like a piece of sculpture—still and statuesque.

The servants, scared out of thought and action, clustered together in a herd; the women wept and wrung their hands; the men were pale and filled with wonder.

Lester waited for the surgeon to advise, and Uxley had not yet begun to think.

Kendrake alone rose equal to the occasion; his first care was for Leonora.

"Bring her child down," he said to Bingham—the only one among the servants who retained any presence of mind.

It was done. The groom returned with Alice. The keeper placed her in her mother's arms, and taking Leonora's passive

hand, led her into a quiet room, and seating her upon a couch, said:

"Remain here, dear lady, and Heaven comfort you. Shall I send you any one—a clergyman?"

The lady shook her head in mournful negative. He saw that she wanted to be alone. He saw that he had done wisely in bringing little Alice to her. She gazed upon her child, and a long drawn, shivering sob broke from her breast. Her large eyes filled gradually with tears. Then the keeper knew she was safe.

- "Believe me," he said, kneeling before her, "in all that may come to your child and you, there is one faithful heart that will not fail you."
 - "I know-I know. He said you loved him."
 - "See by how I shall avenge him."

The words were spoken like a vow.

He went back to the hall.

In such an emergency as the present the inherent force of his nature became visible, and now that he assumed responsibility, none questioned his words.

Stephen Lester yielded quietly. With the death of Earl Robert the steward's place and power were gone. He had only the right of past service—Kendrake had the right of affection.

He took Lord Sydney in his arms, and bidding the servants follow with Earl Robert, led the way to the state bed-chamber. It adjoined the one in which the master of Charnett had lain during his sickness.

There they placed him again. Sydney reposed on the ancestral couch.

Then he turned to Dr. Hamilton, and said with respectful decision:

"I know not, sir, what course would be pursued under ordinary circumstances; but you being in some sort a friend, and having been with the earl during his last moments, must be acquainted with his wishes, and in the Lady Leonora's name, I

ask your advice—I am sure I have her full concurrence in so doing."

"I am sure of it, too, Mr. Kendrake. His lordship's words were so explicit that the course is clear. Mr. Lester and myself were present at the reconciliation, when he expressed his wish that the sole and entire property should go to Lord Sydney, Lady Leonora, and their child."

The steward and Reuben Uxley exchanged glances.

"There are two wills, one of which is to be destroyed, and in the other there is a codicil the earl would have altered had he been spared; it concerns the supposed son of Ewrick Lois. I can give any information that may be wanted; but for the present it would be best perhaps to place both documents under seal, and await the arrival of Lord Sydney's solicitor, with whom Mr. Uxley can arrange."

"Certainly," said Uxley; "as it is possible the curious complication in the matter may lead to legal inquiry, and perhaps litigation, your advice is sound, and entirely in concurrence with my own views upon the subject."

"There will be an inquest," said Hamilton.

"Undoubtedly."

The lawyer had one merit—he could reply with brevity at times

"Steps should be taken," continued Hamilton, "to have the murderer followed and secured. It should have been done before, but in a time like this men cannot take prompt action or bring reason instantly to bear."

"The constabulary," Uxley began.

Kendrake broke in with a burst of scorn.

"Mongrels who could not strike a trail were it directly before them; dull plodding brutes who work by discipline and routine. Give the case to them and they will hunt an innocent man to death, while the guilty man escapes to laugh at them."

"Trne," said the doctor; "but it is our duty to set the law force, and if its agents do not find him, who can?"

John Kendrake strode up the chamber and placed his hand upon the pillow whereon lay the dead lord's head.

"I will," he said, with emphatic solemnity. "It was no stranger's work, no common desperado slew Earl Charnett's son. The motive was not greed of gain; and by the gloom of this dark night above us, by the love I bore my foster-brother, the oath I swore to him, I will hunt the assassin down, and never quit my purpose till my hand is on his throat; no corner of the earth shall hide him, and when we stand face to face, let him ask mercy there, I can give him none. This red night's work shall have as red a retribution."

Looking at the stalwart fellow, whose powerful features were quivering with intense passionate resolve, the lawyer thought he would rather have the constabulary than such a man on the assassin's track.

- "Should they meet," reflected Uxley, "Michael and our energetic friend, the latter will have a dangerous clew."
- "May I inquire," he said, "on what you base the supposition that it is no stranger's work?"
 - "I keep my counsel on that point, Reuben Uxley."
- "Certainly, certainly; reticence is a merit, but when all are interested——"
 - "I wish to see which way the interest lies."
 - "That implies a doubt, Mr. Kendrake."
- "Oh," said Kendrake, bitterly, "we will not quibble about courtesy; whom shall we trust after such a deed as this?"

The lawyer coughed.

- "The perpetrator of the crime will have had ample time to elude pursuit," he said; "he may be miles away."
- "The perpetrator of the crime is not far distant, Mr. Uxley. The snake that stings seeks repose in the nearest thicket, and does not leave his slime upon the open road."
 - "To speak plainly, you suspect-"
- "No; I wait for proof. When I have seen the Lady Leonora acknowledged Charnett's mistress, when my presence is no

longer required by legal technicalities, I go in quest of him. Meanwhile make the deed known far and wide, summon the magistrates, and set inquiry afoot. It will be a nine days' wonder, and finally add another to the long list of hidden crimes. The criminal will not be brought to justice yet."

Dr. Hamilton was struck by the speaker's words, and yet more by his manner; he determined mentally to converse with him in private.

The lawyer, too, was impressed, and would have liked a private interview, but was far too wary to hint his wish; he listened with assumed indifference, and merely said:

"The magistrates certainly. Sir James Dormer, at Lockstone, is the nearest. I should advise that we send to him at once, also to the chief constable."

The messengers were sent for and dispatched.

"Shall we require them," Lester asked, "before the documents are placed under seal?"

Kendrake turned upon him.

- "There is nothing to be placed under seal," he said, sternly. "The rightful Lady of Charnett is in her husband's house."
 - "But-" commenced Uxley.
- "But what? Is there a claimant, or any one who would dare to say nay to that?"
 - "My dear sir, there are legal-"
- "There are men who would trick Satan till they died, but let none here dispute my lady's right, or, by Heaven! he will never dispute more. With her sanction, you may do anything; until you have that sanction, I will take care that nothing is done."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD HUT ON THE HEATH.

To a gentleman gifted as was Reuben Uxley, with a keen insight into human character, it was evident that the forest-keeper was not a man to be trifled with. He had never been known to utter an idle threat.

The rugged honesty of Kendrake's nature had displayed itself on more than one occasion; he had set fire to the cottage he was born in because it was sullied by his sister's shame; and once, after a conflict with a desperate poacher, who would have slain him had Kendrake not been the better and the stronger man, he had taken the poor wretch home, and given him shelter till he recovered from injuries got in the fight.

That was an act of rude and noble generosity which told much to the keeper's honor. Some men would have thought it glory to send the depredator to prison and gain the paltry reward; Kendrake looked upon him as a fellow-creature driven by want into misdoing. The keeper did the duty due to his master when he brought the poacher down; he did the duty due to manhood when he took him to his own roof and succored him.

These things were in the lawyer's mind when he reflected on the best way to deal with Lady Leonora's champion. With an ordinarily constituted man Uxley could have dealt without trouble, but Kendrake was not an ordinary man.

"May I suggest," said Lester, coming to Uxley's relief, "that as steward to the Charnett estate, it is my place to arrange——"

"Pardon me; you were steward to Earl Robert, not the estate."

Lester ground his teeth.

"And now?" he asked.

"Matters not immediately relevant to my lady's case may be

discussed in a place more fitting than in the chamber sacred to him who sleeps there."

The steward bowed.

"These documents," said Kendrake, taking the two wills, "we had better replace in the cabinet, and simply lock them in. Doctor Hamilton will see with me that there is no necessity for Mr. Uxley's seal, since Lady Leonora has her own solicitor."

The doctor assented.

"Who will keep the keys?" asked Uxley.

He had a full individual share of self-command, but the keeper's unpromising determination rather interfered with him, and exasperated him to a degree.

- "I," replied Kendrake, "for her ladyship."
- "Mr. Kendrake has undertaken a responsibility," said Hamilton, quietly, "and is fulfilling it."

The lawyer hinted that Mr. Kendrake's right was open to question.

- "May I ask Doctor Hamilton to remain in the house?" said the keeper, in reply. "To-morrow you shall hear from his lips that I am acting in accordance with her ladyship's implied instructions; we could not very well intrude upon her with business at such a time." The doctor assented again.
- "I concur entirely with you," he said offering his hand. "Lord Sydney chose such a guardian wisely for his wife and child."

He felt the grip of Kendrake's hand and honor.

The documents were replaced in the cabinet; the keeper put the keys in his pocket.

"Lord Sydney knew his toster-brother," he said, repressing his emotion; he felt by instinct that the professed sympathy of neither Stephen Lester nor the lawyer was real. "We both were nurtured at my mother's breast, and the association so begun was never broken."

The steward cast a longing glance at the cabinet, and followed Uxley, who had withdrawn to the door.

- "When will her ladyship's solicitor be communicated with?" inquired the latter.
 - "In the morning," replied Kendrake.
 - "Do I know the firm?"
- "Messrs. Pentland & Snell," said Doctor Hamilton, "Ludgate."
- "Thank you; I will do myself the honor of writing to them. Good-night, sir; Mr. Kendrake, good-night."

The keeper responded abruptly. The lawyer's exaggerated courtesy jarred upon him.

"You," he said to Lester, and saying as much as he dared before retiring, "whom, until I hear further, I must regard as steward to the Charnett estate, will inform me should anything requiring my attendance take place."

" Instantly."

They withdrew together. When they reached the hall Lester rang the groom's bell, and Bingham came.

"Mr. Uxley's horse," the steward said.

To the great surprise of both, Bingham rang the bell.

"One of the house-grooms will attend," he said, composedly, and walked away.

It was clear the steward's reign was at an end—insubordination had commenced already.

"Not a healthy sign, Lester, eh?"

"Curse them, no! They hate me, and they always did, from coal-boy to butler; but I have made them suffer for it."

"Which may have been more consolatory than profitable. Ah, Lester, my friend, we live in an ungrateful world. You had better ride with me, and we can advise each other as we go."

"Ride? I question very much whether I should be allowed a horse. Yesterday the spiritless clowns would have trembled at my anger, now they would laugh at it."

"Bad, very bad; always make friends—conciliate your fellow-creatures; at least while they are useful, and you never know

what may happen. Cultivate a good name, Stephen; it may do good service when you most want and expect it."

"Here is your horse."

Uxley took the rein from the stable-boy, and after he had mounted he bent low, and whispered in the steward's ear:

- "Be on the alert to-night."
- "For what?"
- "A signal-a cuckoo's cry."
- "What will it mean?"
- "That a visitor is coming."
- "Who?
- " Michael Eurick."

He chirped to his old gray horse, and rode down the drive.

"That means mischief," said Lester, mentally. "Michael Ewrick will not come for nothing; he is rash to come so soon—more than rash; he must have a nerve of steel. If I had done that deed, I could not pass the keeper's lodge to-night."

When Uxley reached his residence, he was not surprised to hear from his old servant that the strange gentleman was waiting for him.

Michael Ewrick had taken up a position in the best room; he occupied the couch—an antiquated and comfortable piece of furniture—and he had made free with the lawyer's wine.

Uxley looked with a curious kind of admiration at the fine, powerful form and well-cut face. He wondered at the man—how he could rest there and take careless sips of wine within two hours of having killed his cousin.

The lawyer had noticed that Michael had placed a soft cushion under his right shoulder.

- "Then Kendrake was correct," he said; "he did hit you?"
- "Yes; the fellow is a good marksman. Had the charge been a bullet instead of shot, I should not have run again after being hit. How goes it, Reuben, with my poor uncle?"
 - "Dead."
 - "I thought he would be by this time. Well, he has lived a

life-time. The Charnetts are not a long-lived race. Earl Robert had more than the family share of existence."

- "Sydney, I need not tell you---"
- "Sleeps with his father. The shot that sent him home only quickened a not distant termination. Now what news is there? The town alarmed—all Charnett in an uproar—search being made for the criminal?"
- "No; Charnett is a quiet place. Few of the inhabitants are abroad after dark. The report of a gun is not calculated to excite surprise, and so, until the constabulary are apprised of what has taken place, it is known only to the household and ourselves."
 - "Then we are safe from pursuit—suspicion?"
- "Safe from pursuit; suspicion is another matter. We must be very watchful, or Kendrake will give us trouble. The fellow is keen-sighted and logical."
 - "We cannot have much to fear from him."
- "We have. He is the Lady Leonora's chosen guardian, and she could not have a better. I did not think there was so much in him till to-night, when he said some things that quite astonished me."
 - "Indeed?"
- "He has a way of making unpleasant remarks," said Uxley, with spiteful recollection, "that may or may not be personal. He treated me with most uncompromising want of respect, and some little stratagems of mine were knocked on the head without mercy."
 - "If he baffled Reuben Uxley he is worth attention."
- "He refused to have anything set under seal, saying there was no necessity for such a step, as the rightful Lady of Charnett was in her husband's home."
 - "Did you submit?"
- "I had no alternative. He stated very plainly that if any one were disposed to dispute her claim they should never dispute another. I began to hint that there were certain legal forms to

be complied with, when he cut me short with some such reply as you would make, saying some men would trick Satan till they died."

"The inference was certainly unpleasant, especially to a legal gentleman, for he cannot hope to cheat his master after death."

Uxley winced at the sarcasm. He had misgivings now and then as to how his way of life might affect his future state.

"He is dangerous," the lawyer repeated; "for he has a fixed conviction that the motive for the—the—"

"Crime," said Michael, coolly. "We need not be particular about terms, Reuben. Those who do not carry out the theory of ways and means in the great game of life to such an extent as we do might be sensitive concerning the hard names that are given to certain acts; we cannot afford to be. Say the crime."

"Well, then, the crime. His conviction is that the motive has arisen from some deep cause inimical to the interests of Lady Leonora, and he will be on the alert eagerly for every clew."

"Was he entirely in Lord Sydney's confidence?"

"Completely; they had no secrets from each other."

"Then he will give trouble," said Ewrick, reflectively. "I was a bungler for not giving a different color to the possible cause. But I had not time; he came too quickly. I could only take what I wanted."

"Otherwise---"

"I would have made it look the work of an ordinary robber."

"I doubt whether he would have been deceived even then; he went even to the conclusion at a leap, and the manner in which he swore to hunt the slayer down made my blood run cold."

"Are you nervous, Reuben?" asked Ewrick, ironically.

"No; but I feel there is a cause to beware of him. Let him ever get a clew, and he will hang on your trail with the tireless, savage resolution of a blood-hound."

"So much the worse for him," said Michael, with ruthless

quietude; "should he come in my way, I would strike him from it with as little remorse as I would set my heel upon a serpent's head."

He rose. The shoulder Kendrake's shot had entered pained him, but he did not move a muscle.

- "Are you badly hurt?" the lawyer inquired.
- "No; the charge did not enter in a compact body; but I think one of the sinews is destroyed."
 - "Your coat is stained."
- "My shirt is soaked with blood. I have borne a worse wound though, without changing my garments for days. I have seen some toil, some hardship and suffering; endured much for less than I hope to gain by this. Help me to change my dress, Uxley; we must not lose time."
 - "Nothing more can be done to-night."
- "The work began must be proceeded with. I have gained the first point, and now is the time to strike the second blow; besides, I must see her."
 - "The Lady-"
- "Leonora." Ewrick's fierce eyes burned with fire. "Perdition's red abyss shall not keep me from her."
 - "But to-night-"
 - "To-night or-"
- "Caution, Michael, caution; the household will be awake and Kendrake on the alert; yet, if we have resolved to go, what I have done will help you."
 - "What have you done?"
 - "Told Lester to listen for a cuckoo's cry; when he hears that he will know you are near."
- "A wise forethought. I might have felt remorse at what I did this night, but for the thought he was my rival, that the glorious beauty I should think cheaply won at the cost of soul and body had been his to love. You smile; the feeling seems strange to you, but my passions are all powerful, and strong desire for her has eaten into my heart's core."

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- "I am sorry to hear it."
- " Why?"
- "Passion is the wreck of many a man."
- "It will not be of me."
- "She will not love you."
- "She will be mine; I shall hold her life-strings in my hand. Come, help me off with these; there are other garments in my valise."
 - "Where do you propose going?"
- "To the hut on the heath. This is the best time; to be seen in daylight visiting that place would attract attention."
- "But now, while people are out on the search, when every stranger will be viewed with suspicion, the risk—"
- "I do not stand for risk. Men who wait and watch in fear of consequences rot in poor inaction. I have some work for Simon McDonald."
 - "Does it concern the lady?"
 - "Her child."
 - "Von intend-"
- "To take her away. It will leave Leonora helpless at my mercy, and be one more removed from the path I intend to tread."
 - "And direct suspicion directly upon you!"
- "Fear not; I am too old a hunter not to know how to hide a trail."
 - "It will not be safe to appear as a claimant yet?"
 - "That we will discuss anon. How does the wound look?"
- "Bad. Fortunately, it is in the fleshy part only, and not the bone."
- "Then it is nothing; washed and bandaged, I shall feel no inconvenience. You must be my doctor, Uxley."

The lawyer washed the wound, and bandaged it with some amount of skill. Then he helped Michael to put on fresh attire.

"That will do," said Michael, as he produced and carefully

charged a pair of handsome pistols. "I may want these. I shall not be absent many hours, and in the meantime you can tear and burn these things. Never leave a trace that can be hidden; it is a safe principle."

Uxley shuddered slightly as he laid the blood-stained clothes aside.

"Your nerves do not seem shaken, Michael."

"They turned to iron long ago, when my mother died." What I have done is but a part of the vengeance I swore to have. People were very merciless to her—the Charnetts—her husband's kindred, humbled her proud spirit to the dust, and set a burning brand on me. Such kindness as they gave I will return; they killed her—a slow and lingering death of torture. I have been so cruel—I strike at once."

At midnight Michael Ewrick went out, crossed the village road, and struck into the meadows that led to the heath. The party sent in quest of the assassin had passed some time since. Ewrick encountered no human being.

The poacher's hut was situated almost in the center of the forest. Michael evidently knew the way—he only paused once where several narrow tracks diverged, and, choosing one, went on. He hastened on until he reached the poacher's hut.

Then he beat against the door with a pistol butt, and waited a reply.

It came—a deep tone said:

"Who's there?"

"An old friend."

"I do not know the voice."

"Open the door, and you will know the man."

In reply, he heard the unmistakable click of a gun-lock, and the same deep tone said:

"If you want shelter seek it elsewhere. If you mean treachery be warned. I admit no stranger to-night."

Michael laughed.

"We are not strangers, Simon."

"Whether or not, go and leave me in peace; if you stay, I fire through the door."

Michael took a step back, and with one powerful kick, shattered the rough planks. They did not offer much resistance, and he stood in the opening.

The wild, herculean figure of Simon McDonald confronted him, with gun at aim and finger on the trigger. The very audacity of the stranger's act in forcing entry kept him from firing.

"Put the gun down, Simon; I have the quicker eye, and your old weapon might hang fire; mine would not; that must be a relic—a flint-lock. Why don't you buy or steal a better?"

The poacher's aspect changed while Michael spoke; he set the gun down slowly as recognition dawned upon him.

- "Michael Ewrick!" he said.
- "Good! You have a memory worth keeping. You are the only one who has recognized me in spite of change."
- "I see few faces," said the poacher, subdued by some feeling that changed his attitude of menace into irresolution, "and I do not forget the old ones."
- "That is right. What a picture this would make—your own uncouth figure in that deerskin coat and gaiters, the torch stuck in the ground, and a heap of dead leaves for a bed. They said you were a semi-barbarian. Are you sufficiently civilized to have a seat for a guest?"
 - "I have nothing but what you see; I want no more."
 - "Except a quiet conscience. Don't scowl, man."
 - "Don't mock me."
- "Pshaw! never skrink from a jest or the truth. You should not be thin-skinned—it is strange."
 - "Why strange?"
 - "In Simon McDonald, poacher, convict, and incendiary-"
 - "Ha!"

The man sprang for his gun. Michael caught him by the collar with the left hand; it held him like a vise,

"It is I who should be angry," he said, putting a pistol within an inch of Simon's ear, "not you, McDonald. If I did not want you, the miserable life you waste would end here. A movement of my finger, and your brains would spatter the roof. That was devilish work, Simon, the incendiarism."

"I did not do it."

"Don't lie. I have not come to give reproaches—have not come to accuse. The best proof that I have come to save is that I do not kill. Stand over there—leave your gun here—and listen to me."

The poacher obeyed—cowed into submission by the other's more than human strength and fearlessness.

"Who set you on to burn the old church?" Michael asked, fixing the other with his steadfast gaze. "Answer without prevarication—denial is useless, since I know you did the act."

A sweat broke out upon the poacher's brow.

"Why should you make me tell?" he said, abjectly. "I have had the horrors ever since."

"It was Lester, the steward."

The reluctant answer wrung from McDonald was an affirmative.

"One would think that for such an act the reward should have been sufficient to keep you from this state of misery."

"Ay, but he was o'er cunning," said Simon, who in times of deep emotion spoke a strong Scotch accent, and with something of the Scottish style. "It was never rightly put to me, but hinted and instilled bit by bit. He said that there was one who could not rest while one stone of the whole church stood on another."

"By the one who could not rest he meant my uncle, Earl Robert."

"I did not say so."

"There is nothing now to bind your tongue. Earl Robert is dead." The announcement caused a marked change.

"Dead! I am glad and sorry—for he was my benefactor and

my tempter. I had crime enough before Stephen Lester came to me and set me on to do that sacrilege; but it can do no harm to speak now. He did mean Earl Robert."

"The steward assigned no motive for his wish?"

"None. I doubt if the Lord of Charnett ever expressed it openly; he had an over-zealous servant—one who would act upon his look—and the servant put the work to me. They'd got my pardon, and they gave me habitation, and Scotch blood will do much for gratitude."

"And when it was done?"

"They never spoke of it to me, never seemed as if it had been mentioned, but said if any one knew who did it he had better keep his own good counsel."

"That was Charnett's subtlety," said Michael, through his teeth, "to tempt a man to sin, then leave him to remorse and jeopardy. When you fired the church, Simon, you did a bitter wrong to me."

"I did not know it then, but I have had reason to think it since."

"You were but a poor tool in the hands of those who instigated it. I thought of that, else you would not be living now. The trail of vengeance is a red one, Simon, and mine will not be stainless. I do not punish the hirelings, but as they helped to wrong me, so they must help me to revenge."

"I had hoped to die here quietly, and not meet the world again."

"I want your assistance, Simon. It will bring you profit; and, should it add another sin to those you have already, the fault is yours. I give you release from this miserable fate, this wretched den and savage seclusion. Who would think to find in you the gay and brilliant member of the turf—the handsome officer and keen sportsman, Captain Donald?"

"Hush!" said the poacher, passing his hand to his brow.
"Not the past—that is madness."

- "Courage, man. Why, here you are drifting into imbecility, and brooding over things that should be forgotten."
 - "Forgotten! Heaven help me!"
- "Forgotten in that sparkling Lethe, where all who have gold may find oblivion. The river of pleasure is rich and deep, and in its depths you drink the only Lethe. Leave this place behind you, and the past with it. You shall have money."

A lingering trace of liking for the life he had led stirred faint glow in Simon's breast.

- "What must I do for it?" he asked.
- "Take care of a child."
- "Whose?"
- "No matter. Mine, let us say. It is a little girl."
- "Not to harm her?"
- "Not a hair of her head. Take her out of England—to France. Let her forget even her native tongue, if possible; treat her as your own—kindly."
 - "If the task is no worse than that, I consent."
- "And wisely. Had you refused, I would have dragged you out of here and given you back to the hulks. Never heed the threat; I said it that you may understand me."
 - "When shall I have the child?"
- "To-morrow night—not later than the next. I shall bring her to you, and in the meantime here is the money. Resume your own self, change that tattered garb, and with the dress put on the manners of the gentleman you should be."

Michael saw with satisfaction that the poacher's eyes glistened as he took the heavy purse.

- "Are you as good a shot as ever?" he asked, carelessly.
- "I never miss."
- "There is a man in Charnett, a keeper, whom I should like to see in the way of your gun. The shot that brought him down would be worth a thousand pounds."
 - "Who is he?"
 - "John Kendrake."

The poacher said, emphatically:

"Not for a million! He caught me poaching one night before I had privilege, conquered me, but instead of giving me to justice, he gave me shelter. I would rather thrust my hand into the fire and burn it off to the wrist."

"Very well, it does not matter much; I shall be able to deal with him when there is occasion. Do not fail me, Simon."

"I shall not fail," said the poacher, sullenly; "it seems fated that I must do sin, and man must obey his fate."

"To-morrow night, then, or the next. A cuckoo's cry will tell you I am near. Then come out and watch to see that I am not followed. None must see me enter here. Should any prowling spy lurk about, you know what to do."

He pointed significantly to the poacher's gun and left the hut. The torch had burned down now; its dying flicker cast a dusky light on Michael's face as he departed.

"In such a time as this," McDonald muttered, looking at the gold as it glittered through the silken purse, "the dead, mysterious hour when naught on earth seems human, and on such a night, starless, somber, I crept forth to perpetrate a sacrilege. I heard the bell toll one as I fired the porch, and I fled back, its echoes floating after me as they are floating now. And, standing here to watch the pyre blaze, I saw, or thought I saw, a form and face like his who went out but now."

He paused and drew a deep breath here.

"It could not have been his uncle, for I helped to bury him; but such a form and such a face it was. It would be no stretch of fancy to think this one a dark and sinister visitant come from perdition to tempt me with gold. He looked like it when the torch-light swept his face and died."

The poacher went into his hut and closed the shattered door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRANGER AT THE INQUEST.

The dawn that followed the dark night's work saw Charnett in a state of intense excitement, and later in the day the Lockstone coach brought numbers from the town. The inquest was to be held at the "Charnett Arms."

Scofield took his coach to and fro incessantly. He had to change his team each journey, for he had not a seat to spare. Some passengers did the double journey with him in the hope of eliciting particulars concerning the tragedy.

The coach was drawn up before the Lockstone hotel, most of the passengers had taken their seats, and Joe was about to mount the box, when a stranger, emerging from the waitingroom, asked if that was the Charnett coach. Joe answered affirmatively, and, being favorably impressed with the stranger's appearance, told him that if he desired to go to Charnett he might occupy the seat beside himself.

The stranger took his seat with alacrity. The driver mounted. He could handle his team in splendid style, and he did so now.

Scofield had no reason to complain on the score of excessive loquacity or curiosity on the stranger's part. The latter was meditative, and did not trouble him with inquiries respecting the all-absorbing topic.

He tapped Joe on the shoulder once, and Joe saw a very fine Havana.

"Thank'ee," he said; "don't mind if I do."

Having taken a light in comfort by slackening the pace, and finding the cigar suited his palate, Scofield began to grow curious on his own account. The stranger had not even tried to start a conversation by venturing on either invariably safe topic—the team or the weather.

- "Find a long journey tiring by rail, sir?"
- "Very. The carriages are hot and dusty, the space limited."
- "So they are, 'specially the London line. Come from London, I suppose, sir?"
- "Yes; I wanted a change. I am sick of the sea-side, and thought a little quiet country place would be preferable."
- "There ain't many prettier bits o' scenery than here in Charnett, sir; that's my opinion."
- "And mine, too, by what I have seen of it. In fact, I came upon the partial recommendation of a friend who was here last year. Like me, he does not care for hotel fare, so he put up at an inn, and he spoke very highly of the cellar."
 - "In Charnett, sir?"
 - "Yes-in fact, the Charnett Inn."
- "I'm very much obliged to your friend; it's pleasant to get a good word when you try to deserve it. The Charnett Inn belongs to me."

The stranger affected some strange surprise.

- "He said the coach stopped there; I do not think he mentioned you as its proprietor."
- "Well, it stops there, sure enough, though I go on to Limport; and, if you stay with us, I don't doubt but what you'll say your friend made no mistake about the cellar."
- "Do you remember him? A rough, strange fellow, eccentric rather; an artist—Hewbert, by name."
- "Mr. Hewbert, don't I remember; a gentleman, affable, and a better judge of a real vintage I never hope to see. Why, he would make himself snug in our little parlor and do a pipe with me, sir. I've got a pipe he gave me—a meershum—a beauty, black as your hat, sir; he made a picter of Jem's little gal. Jem is my son, sir."

The stranger needed no introduction after this. Joseph would have given him welcome, and supplied him gratis with all the information he possessed.

"Having you here alongside o' me," said Joseph, "just re-

minds me of a gentleman as sat last night where you are sit ting, but he were rather a curious customer."

The stranger knocked the ashes of his cigar and said, "Ah, rather as though to fill the pause than because he felt interested

- "Yes, he gave me a real good weed—up to this, and that saying something. It was just about dusk time, and would yo believe it," he added, dropping his voice, "he got down at th lodge-gate. Jem noticed him by that, and when he got hom Jem says to me:
- "'I say, governor, did you see them three as got out inside same time as him as were with you?"
 - "''What!' says I, 'the lady and gentleman with a little girl? "'Yes.' says he.
- "'Then,' says Jem, 'if they wasn't our own Master Sydne; come back with the foreign lady and a child, I ain't Jem Scofield.'
- "'If that's the case,' said I, 'it's the strangest thing that eve happened to me. I took them away in this very coach year ago, and now they have come back home in it. I was telling the gentleman as rode with me all about it, and then, sir, sun enough as that was last night and this is this morning, Ken drake, the keeper, found the poor young gentleman dead, when he hadn't been here two hours."
- "Curious, certainly," the stranger said, hiding beneath ar assumption of ordinary interest, an eagerness the driver did no see.
- "Curious? the most extraordinary thing that ever happened, that's my opinion. The gentleman got out of me all I knew about the Charnetts, and there ain't many know more than I do."
 - "He drew you out?"
- "I like that," said Scofield, in derision at the idea, "I ain't druv this road—never missing a day—for thirty year odd, to be drawn out by a cazhel passenger; no, sir, we had just a friendly chat, and it's my opinion I couldn't tell him much more than

he knew about the people up there; yet he was a perfect stranger. I see nigh every one that comes and goes through from Lockstone to Limport, and if I had seen him I shouldn't have forgotten him."

" Why?"

"His looks, his build—one of them that don't appear big, but have got the strength of a lion—a handsome fellow, too, with such a pair of eyes as I never saw, and a fine beard—somehow he seems to run in my head, talking with me about the earl, and then young Lord Sydney coming home to be murdered like that."

"Not that you associate him with the deed?"

"Heaven forbid! He was a perfect gentleman—just about as likely to kill any one as I am—and I wouldn't hurt a worm. He said he would perhaps put up a day or two with me."

"And did he come?"

"No; he got down at the lodge, as I say, and turned back, so Jem says. He asked for old Reuben Uxley. That's his house we're passing—a queer, tumble-down place; a civil-spoken man is Reuben, though a lawyer."

"There will be an inquest, I should imagine?" said the quiet stranger.

"It begins to-day. I was going to say that you will be put about, perhaps, a little, as it's at my place; but you won't mind, maybe?"

"Not the least; we must take things as they come."

"That's right—the rough with the smooth. Look at them lovely hills, sir; Mr. Hewbert was always sketching them."

"They have a beautiful effect from here."

"That's the house. We are in sight of it now; you wouldn't think to look at it that a curse was on it; but, as Kendrake has said to me, the Charnett's are a fated race. There is not one of the old stock left now."

"Not one?"

"Well, I mean of the males; there's the little girl-poor

Master Sydney's, and they do say there's a son of the earl's brother; but there's a whisper that it wasn't all right between his mother and father."

"That he is not legitimate, you mean?"

"That's it; I couldn't think of the word."

Had it not been that the passengers on the seat behind the box were in such close proximity to Scofield and the quiet stranger, it is possible the latter would have been favored with the Charnett's history in full.

But having touched so far upon it the driver went no further, and the stranger suppressed whatever anxiety he felt to hear more.

The magistrate, Sir James Dorman, who had been communicated with as soon as possible after Sydney's death, took proper measures to have the matter investigated without delay. A preliminary inquiry, at which he was to preside as coroner, was to be proceeded with at once.

Sir James felt more than an ordinary interest in this—he had been on terms of intimacy with the victim's father.

So the jury, a mixture of the Lockstone and Limport tradesmen, was convened immediately.

Coroner and jury were ready to begin by the time Scofield reached the inn with the coach. The majority who came with him would fain have stopped there, but the place was crowded already.

"They want you for a witness, Joseph," said Mrs. Scofield to her husband. She was a comely matron, with a keen eye to business, and a large idea of Scofield's importance; "though what you know about it I can't imagine."

"Never you mind, Maggie," (Joseph had been married a great many years, and had learned the value of discretionary silence); "look after lunch for Sir James and the jury; don't bother about what I know."

"'Tain't enough for women folk to know too much," he

said, turning to the stranger, who had become a favorite already; "perhaps you would like to see the inquest?"

"I would; but it would not be allowed, I fear?"

"It could be managed, sir, if you wouldn't mind going in with Mr. Richards—he is the editor of the *Charnett Gasette*. They would take you for his reporter."

"I will allow you to arrange it," said the quiet stranger.

The innkeeper introduced the quiet stranger to Mr. Richards will a result mutually satisfactory.

They exchanged cards—on the stranger's was inscribed:

"Mr. Robert O'Neil,

"St. George's Club,
"Pall Mall."

Mr. Robert O'Neil was the only stranger present while the preliminary investigation went on

Scofield was the first witness called—he simply said that Lord Sydney, with his wife and child, entered with the other passengers at Lockstone; and that they were set down at the lodge-gate at about nine o'clock.

He spoke of the stranger who had ridden with him, his inquiries concerning the earl, and in response to the coroner's query, stated that he would be able to identify him.

Mr. Scofield was then told to stand down, and the next witness was called.

There was a gentle hush when John Kendrake's stalwart form entered. The look of settled sorrow in his fine face could not but excite sympathy.

With graphic power the foster-brother of the murdered man gave his evidence, which is already known to the reader.

"When I fully realized the deed of horror which had been committed," he continued, "I asked Heaven above to let me avenge my brother. I prayed the help of the Most High that I might find the track, and swore that when I strike the trail the slayer shall be hunted down till I can set my hand upon his throat, look with all my hate and all all my thirst for vengeance

into his quailing eye, and while I slowly crush existence out of him, say this, 'Each death-pant is for Sydney, my foster-brother.'"

"That man will keep his word," thought Mr. O'Neil, who seemed intensely interested in the proceedings. "It is but a question of time. I must speak with him anon."

What followed then in evidence was but a repetition of bare detail. Stephen Lester and Doctor Hamilton stated what they knew, the statement of each was but a corroboration of what had gone before. The testimony failed to indicate a motive for the crime.

The verdict was as Kendrake anticipated, "Willful murder against some person or persons unknown."

One of the jurymen suggested that the stranger who had alighted at the gate should be found and examined.

The coroner asked for what reason.

"We want all the information we can get," said the juryman, bluntly, "and the stranger may know a little."

"Good," thought Mr. O'Neil; "that man knows his duty."

"If he went to Mr. Uxley's," said the former speaker, "Mr. Uxley ought to give an account of him."

"The arrest and detention of a gentleman who by chance was set down at the same time and place as the deceased, may involve some trouble," suggested Sir James. "If he went to visit Mr. Uxley, that gentleman will doubtless be able to give a satisfactory account of him."

"We will take the risk," said the juryman; "and I, Sir James, think it an important point that we should know whether this stranger did go to Mr. Uxley. He ought to be brought here."

He had scarcely spoken before the door opened and Michael Ewrick entered.

He bowed to the coroner with proud grace, and his imperious gaze swept every face in the room. His entry caused a marked sensation; his silent, sinister majesty of aspect seemed to subdue ordinary men.

A quick, vivid flash shot like an electric light from Kendrake's eye, his hand clenched as though upon a gun. O'Neil, who watched him closely, expected to see him leap upon the stranger like a tiger.

Kendrake did not; a moment, and he was calm again. But his set gaze never left the stranger's brow.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHEVALIER DE BURADOC.

The stranger kept his position by the door, and faced the company with an air of careless curiosity. He was apparently quite unconscious that he himself was the center of observation.

He did not seem to recognize a single countenance in the room; but Mr. Robert O'Neil, watching him closely, saw the stranger's features change expression twice. The change was but momentary, and almost imperceptible.

It was not lost, however, by Mr. O'Neil.

"His eyes must be as keen, his memory as retentive as mine," that gentleman thought; "and he certainly has more than human strength of nerve."

O'Neil evidently felt a considerable amount of interest in the stranger who had come to the inquest.

Sir James, however, broke the silence.

"This," said he, addressing Scofield, and indicating the stranger by his glance, "is the gentleman of whom you were speaking?"

How the coroner arrived at that conclusion the honest innkeeper could not imagine; yet the inference was easily derived from the start he gave at seeing his curious passenger of the preceding evening.

Joseph cast a half apologetic glance at the stranger as he replied:

- "The very one, Sir James. He won't deny it, I am sure."
- "Deny what?" asked Michael Ewrick, quietly.
- "Well, you see, sir," began Scofield, rubbing his forehead nervously, "that Sir James and the jury seem somehow to think—"
- "Go on, my good fellow. What do Sir James and the jury think?"
- "You were a passenger on the Lockstone coach last night?" the coroner said, coming to the driver's relief.
- "Yes. May I inquire why the simple mention of that fact here should appear to be a point of interest?"
- "In the matter before us," said Sir James, with severe and respectful gravity, "every atom of evidence, every clew, however slight, is a point of great interest. You have surely heard of the sad affair which we are now investigating?"

Michael bowed.

- "It has transpired that you alighted at the lodge-gate at the same time as did the unfortunate gentleman who met his death."
- "So I imagined, by what I heard this morning. The circumstance that a gentleman did alight at the lodge-gate was naturally recalled to my mind."
- "And as naturally," said Sir James, "we, associating the coincidence of the time and place with the perpetration of the deed so soon afterward, are anxious to hear whatever testimony you have to offer."
- "Simply none. I was chatting with the driver till we reached the gate, my intended destination."
 - "You were going then to Charnett House?"
 - "Such was then my original intention."
- "May we, without intruding unnecessarily upon your private matters, inquire upon what business?"

"Certainly. Permit me to say that my motive in coming here was not idle curiosity, though I was not prepared for this examination; my business was with Earl Charnett."

The coroner looked greatly surprised; so did Mr. Robert O'Neil.

"I give the explanation," he added, with proudly haughty deference, "because there is some singularity in the case, and because I see plainly that your able coadjutors connect me with it."

The biting contempt with which he said the sneer stung each individual member of the jury.

"It is necessary," said Sir James, "that you render an account of how your time has been passed since you arrived in Charnett."

"Do I," Michael asked with a smile, tigerish even in its seeming placidity, "stanu nere as a witness or a suspected man?"

The coroner had not intended to say quite so much.

"As a witness at present," he said, more courteously.

"Well, then, of the tragedy I can say nothing. I alighted at the lodge-gate, but did not go to Charnett House. I could not intrude with business upon a dying man."

The explanation was satisfactory so far.

"I retraced my way." he continued, "and went to see Mr. Uxley, the lawyer, with whom I have staid till within the last hour. If any further particulars respecting me are wanted, these, I imagine, will suffice: I am the Chevalier de Buradoc; I am a native of France, and my business with the late Earl Charnett was, and with Mr. Uxley is, on behalf of my friend, Michael Ewrick. Charnett's rightful master."

Mr. O'Neil muttered, in an expressive aside, the one word: "Good!"

John Kendrake retained his statuesque attitude, but at the mention of Michael Ewrick's name a thrill shivered through him, and he smiled in strange, bitter doubt,

"Chevalier de Buradoc," said Sir James, "we thank you for this frank explanation. It would not have been asked of you except under the exigencies of the present case."

Michael inclined his stately head with the manner of one accepting a merited apology.

"Should I be wanted again before these proceedings terminate," he said, "a message left with Mr. Uxley will receive attention. There is nothing more to detain me now?"

"Nothing, chevalier."

One of the jurymen whispered to Sir James. Whatever the suggestion was, it was thought worthy of notice.

"Stay!" the coroner said. "By what has been stated in evidence it would appear you are no stranger to Charnett?"

"I am not. My acquaintance with it is derived chiefly from my friend Michael, from whom I have heard so much that I seem quite familiar with it."

"A very guarded witness," thought O'Neil. "It would surely puzzle the long-robed gentlemen to pick a flaw or find ground for suspicion in his evidence."

At this juncture the door opened and Reuben Uxley entered.

"I trust I have not delayed the proceedings," he said. "Pressing arrangements concerning the late earl have kept me engaged."

"And your evidence would, if I understood correctly, have only been corroborative, since Mr. Lester and yourself were together?"

"Just so, Sir James."

The coroner turned to the jury, whom he addressed briefly, descanting most especially this time upon the stranger's statement.

"It is very satisfactory that the Chevalier de Buradoc, with the good taste and courtesy characteristic of his country, has so fully explained away any suspicion that might otherwise have attached to him."

Uxley looked as astonished as a lawyer could.

Suspicion attach to the chevalier!" he said; "there is no possible ground for it."

"So we are informed, now, Mr. Uxley; the investigation, I regret to say, has terminated with no other result than an open verdict of willful murder against some person or persons unknown. I have thoroughly sifted the evidence, and must say that never in the whole course of my career have I met with a case in which the circumstances have been more inexplicable or the motive more obscure."

John Kendrake recalled Lord Sydney's words so sadly spoken in the hour of his death.

"Should I be forgiven," the disinherited had said, "the inheritance will revert to my wife and child, and there will be but one frail life—a child's—between the rich estate of Charnett and any who may covet it."

So thinking, the keeper went from the inquest, and as he went gave one last glance at Michael Ewrick's face. The same expression came upon his own that O'Neil had noticed before.

The lawyer and Michael went away together.

- "Another danger over," said the former. "It was wisely met. Michael."
- "Because boldly—fear makes peril, courage destroys it. Had I taken your advice there would by this time be people on the search for me."
- "True," mused Uxley; "I seek safety in caution. I avoid jeopardy."
- "I," said Michael, "set my heel upon it. The jeopardy avoided lives to be a jeopardy again."
 - "Did you watch John Kendrake?"
 - "I did."
 - "So did I. That smile of his meant mischief."
 - "When?"
 - "When you were termed the Chevalier de Buradoc."
 - "Your fancy only, Reuben-the fellow did not recognize

- "Believe so, if you would rather, but be on your guard nevertheless. It is true that a boy at the lodge was hurt?"
 - "Why?"
- "Nothing," said the lawyer, in a tone that awakened the other's interest.
 - "Who is the boy?"
 - "Kendrake's, the people say."
 - "Was he married?"
 - "No."
 - "Some lowly born brat then, I suppose—a village girl's?"
 - "Possibly."
 - "What became of hers?"
- "The child of Kendrake's sister, of which you were the father? It died with her."

The lawyer had a motive of his own in telling this deliberate lie.

- "So much the better; such things are differently managed in higher circles. There the fair and frail do not let their indiscretions be brought so prominently into notice. A liaison with the poorer is never safe."
 - "Then the moral is, avoid the poorer."
- "Or leave them to those of their kind; but we will not speak of her again. I wish I had never seen the girl."
 - "Strange that it should trouble you."
 - "I had almost forgotten it."
- "Take care that some day it is not fixed upon your memory. Once face to face with Kendrake, and known by him, I would not give an unpaid fee for your life—he is a dead shot."
- "So I have heard before; he must be removed—he must be sent from the estate."
- "That is done easily, and, according to our plan of action, may be done soon. When does Michael Ewrick come to make his claim?"
- "Immediately that he has heard from his friend, the Cheva-Lier de Buradoc, what has happened here."

- "Where is Michael supposed to be now?"
- "Traveling for the benefit of his health, the present state of which will not permit of a too early visit to England."
 - "The plot is subtle rather; have you it well arranged?"
- "Each separate scene, each situation, the finish of each act unto the climax of the whole."
 - "Do not let there be a mistake made during its progress."
- "There cannot be. See how simple this is—the Chevalier de Buradoc, acting for his friend, will make all arrangements complete; the chevalier will see Leonora."
 - "To what end?"
- "The mission is a delicate one. Michael wishes to deal kindly, generously with the unfortunate lady whom his cousin has so greatly deceived. The chevalier, on behalf of Michael, will, in spite of her pecular position, offer her a home in Charnett."
 - "Her peculiar position?"
 - "That of a mistress, not a wife."
- "But how support so tremendous an imposition?" asked Uxley, startled by the unutterable audacity of the idea.
- "Why so tremendous? She has never been recognized—never acknowledged as Lady Sydney Lois, of Charnett. While in France, during these last eight years, at intervals when she has appeared, it has been as Leonora simply, the lyric songstress, and she was universally supposed to be under the protection of an English nobleman; rumor gave him various names."
 - "Her husband in reality."
- "But he—in obedience, it appears, to his father's wish—never owned his title."
 - "There must be a marriage register."
 - "I have it in my pocket, soaked with my rival's blood."
 - "Hush, for Heaven's sake! we are in the open road."
 - "I did but whisper, and there is not a soul near."
- "Then," said Uxley, reassured after looking round, "there must be the church register."

- "In the Chapel de la Madeleine, Versailles," replied Ewrick, with a singular smile. "There might be a thousand other obstacles, but I would sweep them all aside for my birthright and Leonora."
 - "Your birthright?"
- "Mine—mine only. Look"—he turned to gaze upon the noble house, on whose high crest the noontide sun was glowing—"that was my father's home."
- "He sold it, Michael, to Lord Robert; I witnessed the covenant."
- "S'death! shall I suffer for my sire's extravagance or folly? Every foot of Charnett belongs to me by the most just claim."
 - "You cannot annul the covenant."
- "I shall not try; I have no need, being now the next of kin."
 - "Caution; you are the Chevalier de Buradoc."
- "Ay, for the nonce; but as we are together, what occasion for disguise? I tell you, Reuben, we cannot fail."
- "Don't be too sure of that; the case last dealt with is not settled yet—the jury's verdict is not exculpative. There are others on the watch—on the track."
 - "John Kendrake," said Michael, in a tone of scorn.
 - "And another."
 - "Who?"
 - "That stranger with the quiet face who sat by the door, and did not lose a word or look that passed."

Ewrick knit his brows with a silent, recollective stare.

- "He with the frank features and open brow?" he said. "A countenance apparently simply genial—a slim and delicate hand, and an eye that could charm doubt into confidence? I wish I: had observed him more keenly."
 - "You have described him like a photograph."
- "There are few such men in the world. Uncommon spirits recognize each other by instinct, or, if the term is admissible,

sympathetic antagonism; to most people he would seem nothing more than an ordinary pleasant fellow."

- "True—and to you——"
- "One to beware of. The slim and delicate hand could grip like steel—the eye lose its charming candor, and glitter into mine with deadly, indomitable resolution. I met such a man once."
 - "What was he?"
- "An Irishman, but a member of the secret police in France. He knew too much of me, and he uttered a threat."
 - "Did he keep it?"
 - "No."
 - "Where is he now?"
- "That's hard to say. I saw him last as he went into the Seine with a dagger through his throat. I can picture now the menace of his white face and dying hand."
 - "He died then?"

Michael did not reply. The light trample of a quiet footstep sounded close behind him, and in an instant after Mr. Robert O'Neil strolled carelessly past them, humming a popular ditty. Michael had never heard it in England before.

CHAPTER IX.

A MESSAGE TO THE CONTINENT.

Michael, whose hand was resting on the lawyer's arm, tightened his hold involuntarily.

"Walk here slowly," he said; "let him get in advance. He must have been very near to us."

Mr. Uxley wiped his forehead with a faded silk handkerchief.

"So dangerous," he muttered—"so dangerous talking in the open air. We never know who may overhear."

"We should not care, and he heard nothing; he may have caught a few words, but would not comprehend their meaning. That does not trouble me."

Mr. O'Neil was some distance before them now, and still he hummed the Parisian ditty, and he gave the words in excellent French.

"He must have crossed the channel recently," said Ewrick, "for that song only became popular with the people of the capital within the last few weeks."

"You seem to join opinion with me. He is not in Charnett without a purpose."

"He troubles me because I do not know him. At the first glance I fancied I could trace a striking resemblance to my friend the Irish-Frenchman; with the second glance, the resemblance went entirely."

"It is something of a coincidence, though, and worth our attention, that he, having only recently left Paris, should be here with you."

"It is a coincidence," said Ewrick, following the stranger with an unquiet, moody glance; "I must watch him."

Just then they heard the coach-guard's bugle, and the rapid rumble of the heavy vehicle sounded distantly behind them.

Now that the inquest was over so far, the natives of Lockstone and Limport wished to get home again; so Scofield's team was set in motion.

Mr. O'Neil, hearing the bugle, stopped and waited.

The abrupt turn gave him a full view of Uxley and his companion. Ewrick darted a sharp and penetrating glance at him. O'Neil looked him carelessly down from head to foot.

Uxley was perceptibly uneasy. Experience had taught him the importance of seeming trifles; he felt a firm conviction in his own mind that the presence of this quiet, nonchalant gentleman boded mischief.

It was curious, too, so Ewrick thought, that he should have paused directly opposite the keeper's lodge. Michael, in spite

of his great self-control, could not repress a slight shudder as he went by.

A few curious persons were clustered around the gate and hedge outside the fatal spot. Some were allowed to go nearer. The lodge was guarded by two of the local constabulary.

"It be a fated family," Uxley heard an old yeoman say, "and this will be a sorry day for Charnett folk. "It's hard to tell who will be master next—all the old stock gone."

"Ay," said another, shaking his gray head; "and I would not like to say who did that last night. It was no stranger's work. I've heerd feyther tell many a time 'that never a Charnett dies a sudden death except by a Charnett.' It's an old saying, and it's been true to the family for hundreds o' years."

"Wise old oracle," muttered Michael, grimly, "and the legend has never once been false. If there were another Charnett lest, I should be assaid, for it would be his sate to kill me."

The coach stopped at the gate to take on passengers. Mr. O'Neil mounted to the box seat, which Joe had reserved as persistently as in the morning. He only yielded it in favor of the quiet stranger.

"Didn't think we should lose you quite so soon," he ventured to remark, encouraged by the other's quiet manner.

"Nor will you, Mr. Scofield; I am only going to Lockstone. I intended to stroll there, but the ride is more pleasant."

"So it is, sir."

"I shall return with you."

"Do, sir; the house will be more quiet when we get back."

Joe Scofield was inclined to be communicative, and Mr.
O' Neil artfully "drew out" the loquacious driver,

"That murder puzzles me," said Scofield. "The doctor said it was a pistol-shot, and people don't carry pistols in these parts; and it warn't a poacher—there ain't a poacher about here, leastways, only one, and he's a queer 'un."

"A poacher?"

"Used to be; but it seems, somehow, the earl gave him the

right to shoot where he liked after his tussle with Kendrake."

"But who is this poacher?"

"That's what many would like to know. They do say he's touched a bit—mad-like; his beard's nearly waist deep, and his hair long and wild like an Injin savage—that's about what he looks—not dressing in Christian manner, but wearing skins."

"Where does he live?"

"In the old hut across the heath yonder; it got about the heath was haunted, and many as ain't afeerd o' much wouldn't venture over late at night."

"Country people are generally superstitious."

"So they are, sir; but I always says if there's anything worse than myself, let's have a look at it; so we started out one night—me an' Jem; we had heard that there was something to be seen sure as ever the clock struck twelve."

"And you went?"

"Didn't we? Jem's got good stuff in him, though I think he quaked a little when he got near the hut.

"' Father,' says he.

""What?' says I—I'd nothing with me but this here whiphandle, thinking that we might fall foul of an nasty customer.

"See that?' says he.

"I saw nothing for a moment; but sure enough, as we got nearer, there was a great red light, and the clock began to strike twelve.

"I ain't going to say as I liked it exactly," said honest Joe, too much absorbed in his own story to see how deeply the stranger was interested, "but I argues this—ghosts, and such customers, can't get lights to order; it's a human being, and if anything's haunted, it's most likely him."

"Very sensibly argued,"

"But it give me a turn, and Jem held tight on to me. There was Simon McDonald, wild and haggard, like I've read of people who've got remorse of heart, his features working awful like, and him muttering and waving a burning torch as if a maniac."

- "That was the ghost, then?"
- "Nothing else in the world. I knowed Simon very well; he used to come to the Nest, and drink more brandy in a day than I could thrust down my throat in a month. So I got closer, and sings out:
- "'Why don't you go in and sleep like a Christian, 'stead o' being there burning torches and frightening people?'
 - "He turns upon me fierce. I didn't care a bit.
- "'Making believe that the heath's haunted,' says I, 'and getting Charnett a bad name. You ought to know better.'
- "He gave a strange sort of laugh, and grips the skin that covered his chest.
- "'Haunted,' he says; "haunted!—ho! ho! Ay, there are demons on the earth at this hour—mocking, torturing phantoms, who seek refuge here' (inside him he meant). 'Haunted—haunted! would to God I could drive them out!'
- "I remember them was just the exact words, and he dashed the torch away and goes in.
- "'A little sleep will do him good,' says I; 'tis the best thing after too much brandy, and people have queer fancies with dilarium tremmins."
 - "Delirium tremens."
- "That's it, sir. He'd never done nothing, I believe, being a quiet, inoffensive fellow enough; but, as I say, too fond of brandy. He always took the best, which, and speaking like a gentleman, made me think he had seen better days,"
- "There seems to be some strange characters, Mr. Scofield, in this pretty country town."
- "You may well say that, sir, and all connected with the Charnetts. There goes that gentleman with old Reuben—him with the queer name—I thought he was a furriner."
 - "The Chevalier de Buradoc."

The two were entering Uxley's house.

"He's a deep 'un; you heard him say as he was a friend of Michael Ewrick's?"

"I did."

"Well, that's the very one as I was talking about to him, but he never told me he knew him—Michael, as they call him, is the son of Colonel Ewrick."

"Colonel Lord Ewrick Lois, properly."

"Right, sir; but he kept the name of Ewrick when he went away; he was the earl according to things should be, being the eldest brother; but he made Charnett and the title over to the next one, him that's now dead, poor Lord Sydney's father."

"Rather a complication that."

"It is a puzzle," assented Scofield, "till you look into it, then it's simple enough—the colonel, don't you see, went extravagant before his father died, and mortgaged nearly everything—then Lord Robert paid the mortgage and gave his brother a heap of money."

"In return for which he took the inheritance?"

"He didn't want it; but the colonel wouldn't have it. He'd killed his youngest brother, so it's whispered, and he said Charnett was a cursed name, so he gave it up and went abroad with the lady they quarreled about."

"This gentleman, then, the Chevalier's friend, Michael, would be the rightful heir, had not the father sold the birthright?"

"Of course, except that it seems he wasn't born as he ought to have been."

"So far, then, he is to be pitied."

"Yes; but he's a bad 'un—poor Loo Kendrake went into trouble, and died through him, and it'll be a case if ever he comes here to claim the property—Kendrake will do for him, sure as fate."

"He cannot claim; there are Lord Sydney's wife and child?"

"That's what I could not make out—but him with the peculiar name——"

[&]quot;The Chevalier?"

"The Chevalier," said Scofield, with the nearest imitation he could give, "called him Charnett's rightful master."

"From which we may anticipate that another page will be added to the family history of mystery and crime. Strange that there should be so many dark stains in the secret annals of most noble houses."

"It is," said the driver, emphatically; 'and the higher you go the worse it is."

When the coach reached Lockstone, O'Neil went into the telegraph department of the station. He seemed relieved to find that no other person came to call in requisition the services of a juvenile clerk, whose chief occupation for the time was smoothing a shadowy mustache, and sketching fancy figures on the blotting pad.

"O'Neil took a pen and wrote the following message:

"Charnett-Mic. Ew. al. Chev. de Bur., 's mur - - L. Sdy.-i. t. tm.? R. O. N.

"To Mons. Chicto, 7. Rue St. Denis, Paris. France."

"That must go at once," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk, wondering whether it was a prescription or some secret correspondence concerning a hideous conspiracy; "it will go from London Bridge."

"No matter where, so that it goes quickly and correctly. What is the charge?"

The clerk named it. O'Neil gave him exactly double, and staid to see the electric needle tell its message.

"There will be an answer in all probability," he said.

"To whom addressed, sir?"

"The initials R. O. N., Charnett. Keep it for me, I will call"

"Very well, sir."

And the message went. Mons. Chicto, who received it in the secluded study of his splendid Parisian hotel, translated it thus: "Charnett, Michael Ewrick, alias Chevalier de Buradoc, has murdered Lord Sydney. Is it time? Robert O'Neil."

"Not time yet, good Robert," Chicto said to himself; "our friend Michael will give us work and profit."

And Chicto, the Fouche of his period, the Minister of Police, powerful, mysterious, whose face was like a mask—expression-less; whose eyes was like his mind—fathomless, inscrutable—sent from his study this reply:

"To R. O. N., Charnett, W. A. W. Gustave Chicto."

That was all Mr. O'Neil wanted; the W. A. W. were his instructions—"Watch and wait." He mused when upon calling at the station he received the answer.

"That will be a long game, but I have patience, and the career of our friend Michael, as Chicto calls him, interests me—he is worth watching and waiting for."

So it was evident that Mr. Robert O'Neil, the quiet, handsome gentleman, slim and delicate of hand as Michael had said, and with an eye that could charm doubt into confidence, was one of Chicto's blood-hounds, and they were creatures of a terrible leash.

No trail so deeply hidden but they could strike it; no animal of prey—and the worst are human—so strong and swift that they could not bring him down. When Gustave Chicto set Robert O'Neil upon Michael Ewrick's track, Michael Ewrick's destiny was fixed—only death could put the blood-hound off the scent.

"Watch and wait," O'Neil reflected, "but in the meantime work. I must see John Kendrake—I must see Simon McDonald."

And on the evening of the day following that on which the inquest took place, John Kendrake, drawn by a resistless fascination to the place of his foster-brother's death, went down to the lodge, taking Ishmael with him.

"It was there he fell," said Kendrake, with bitter sadness, as he stood by the threshold and gazed upon the soil; "there he was stricken down, and there upon the sward the red trail ran;

each blade of grass stained with my brother's blood, is like a voice asking me to mete out retribution, and I shall do it, for I have the track."

"Shall we follow it together?" asked a quiet tone, "for I too have a clew."

Lifting his eyes to see who had spoken, the keeper saw the grave, genial face of Mr. Robert O'Neil.

CHAPTER X.

THE SIN PHANTOM.

The keeper rose from his kneeling posture and stood erect; the look with which he regarded Mr. O'Neil was one of surprise, mingled with some doubt as to a stranger's motive.

- "I am interested in this case, Mr. Kendrake," said O'Neil, quietly, "almost as deeply as you are."
 - " You?"
- "And like you, I have, or think I have, a clew," continued the young Irishman, without heeding the keeper's interrogation; "we might help each other."
- "But what interest of yours can bear comparison with mine?" asked Kendrake, sadly. "You do not know the bond there was between me and him who died here."
- "I do; it was one of those friendships so rare in this world of ours—a strong, affectionate devotion on your part, reciprocated by kindly sympathy on his—it was a feeling that leveled the iron barrier of caste, and made him come to you as to an equal for succor."
 - "How do you know this?"
 - "I was at the inquest."
- "True; but you seem as if you are acquainted with more than might have been gathered there."

- "Some men look beyond the surface of the things they see—I do, and I saw in you what I wanted—the stern fidelity to your murdered foster-brother, that will take you with savage tenacity on the track of his destroyer."
- "Ay," said John Kendrake, with the old lurid fire in his glance, "to the death!"
- "I have not so powerful a motive," said O'Neil, "but I have the same resolve. This mystery, if it be a mystery, of Lord Sydney's fate, is only one in many—some in the past, some yet to come."

The keeper assented with a somber, thoughtful gesture.

"If it be a mystery," he repeated.

"I see you are with me in that," said O'Neil, with less than his accustomed quietude. "I think our suspicions take the same channel; we both, for instance, think it very strange that Lord Sydney should have died so soon after the advent of Michael Ewrick's friend."

The keeper drew a deep, hard breath, and said:

- "The Chevalier de Buradoc-why, I could have sworn-"
- "What I could swear—that between the chevalier and his friend, Michael, there is more than a singular resemblance. Well, suppose we were to state our thought on sound oath, what would the result be?"
- "We should be laughed at, mocked. The serpent works in silence, and the trail he leaves is difficult to follow."
- "Still more difficult when, as in the case of ours, the serpent sheds his skin and assumes different shapes as skillfully as though each were his native aspect. I know the man; he is Lie's most subtle incarnation."

The keeper's doubt as to O'Neil's motive in seeking his confidence had left him unconsciously. They spoke now like men who could trust each other.

- "Have you seen this man before?" Kendrake inquired.
- "The chevalier? I know him well—better than may be good for him," he added, significantly.

The keeper felt that his new friend was not the man to utter even so slight a threat idly.

"It would be useless," he suggested, "to throw a doubt upon his identity.

"Quite," said O'Neil. "He is admitted into the best Parisian society; he is received at the Tuileries, recognized at the Jockey Club, and, in short, bears an irreproachable character as a French gentleman of fashion. Do not mistake him, Mr. Kendrake; he is not the man to leave a vulnerable point open."

"Let him do his best," said the keeper; "and if my suspicions prove correct, the subtlest web in which he may enshroud himself shall be no shelter; the hot blood at my heart may urge swift vengeance, but I shall risk no chance of sure retribution by a rash step. I have but to watch and wait."

"With patient, tireless vigilance," responded O'Neil, struck by the words that were so exactly those of the reply sent to him by the terrible Chicto; "and I am with you. There is sufficient occupation for both of us. You, if I mistake not, have a double duty."

"To avenge my foster-brother and watch over those he has left behind. The blow that killed him and made the red trail here is not the only one which will be struck in Charnett."

"Right! And take this caution, Kendrake—do not lose sight of them, your charges, for an instant; be a faithful sentinel day and night; keep guard so close that you may hear a strange footstep, or a cry. Whatever happens, count on my assistance, rely upon me as a friend."

"I can believe you."

"Take my hand, look here into my eye—is there treachery in either?"

"No," said the keeper, assured by the expression as honest, and the grip as close and true as his own. "You come to me as a stranger, but I trust you."

"Do; it will be better for us both. Your part of the task is

to watch at home; mine is to watch abroad. And mind—the thought henceforth is to be—not regret—but retribution."

- "As I have sworn!" said the keeper, solemnly.
- "I took my oath long ago," O'Neil said, calmly; "and I shall keep it like fate. Here is my card, Mr. Kendrake. The address is a matter of little consequence; but I can always be heard there. At present, however, I am staying at the Falcon's Nest."
 - "Thanks. And so I have one friend, at least."
- "One who is no less stanch because he is not demonstrative. Men who live my way of life forget to be emotional. We see so much that is strange that we lose all sense of wonder."
 - "Your way of life!" said the keeper. "What is it?"
- "A simple vocation to the initiated," said O'Neil, with a smile. "I study human nature. There are few men who know me, and the few who do would rather not."
 - "The reply is vague."
- "Well, as we work together, I will be more explicit. I am a Phantom."
- "I did not expect you to trifle with me," said Kendrake, gravely.
- "I have a special mission," said O'Neil, speaking gravely too, "and I never trifle. I am one of many, and each of the many has a mission like mine."
 - "And it is-"
- "The discovery of secret crime, we mean. A murderer, let us say, is the embodiment of an evil spirit—he is a danger to his kind—a criminal who would, were it necessary to his purpose, cleave his path through a forest of human life. Well, then, this spirit is haunted by a retributive shadow—a sin-phantom. Invisible to him, it never leaves him, but silently and surely, like death, hangs on his track, follows him step by step; the hand is uplifted, the shaft ready, and, when the hour of his fate comes, it strikes."
 - "You, then," said Kendrake, "are one of these-a retribu-

tive shadow, a sin-phantom, silent and sure, like death, and you haunt----"

"The Chevalier de Buradoc," said Robert O'Neil. "Goodnight, Mr. Kendrake."

He shook hands with the keeper and went away. Careless, calm, and graceful, he certainly did not look like a man who had so terrible a purpose.

Mr. O'Neil made his way across Charnett Heath, and toward the ruined hut; his intention was to see Simon McDonald.

In this he was actuated by some motive other than such interest as may have been awakened by Joseph Scofield's recital; he was not a ceremonious gentleman in all cases, for in the present he did not pause to consider whether his entry into the hut would be welcome to the occupant; he pushed open the door and went in.

The poacher, sitting with his head between his hands, lifted his wild, swarthy face; no change came over it as he saw O'Neil.

"What do you want?" he asked; "and why come in like that? My dwelling is not open to the public."

"That is a very hospitable reception," laughed O'Neil. "An untaught backwoodsman or a marauding Arab would give a better. However, I want to talk with you, and I came in like that to save trouble."

The poacher, always on the alert, shifted his position so as to sit within reach of his gun; O'Neil did not affect to notice the precaution, but took a survey of the hut and its contents.

These were different from what he had expected to see; there was no trace of the semi-barbarism in which the poacher was supposed to exist; it was quite apparent that some cause had worked a great alteration in him.

The rough garb he had worn was cast aside, and in its place he had a plain and well-made shooting costume, such as a gentleman would adopt. It became him well—the better because the long, disheveled beard had disappeared, and his dark hair, tinged with iron gray, was carefully arranged.

"McDonald," he said, having finished his scrutiny, "this is an improvement I was not prepared for. I thought to see a savage—a kind of uncouth, solitary Roderick Dhu—and I behold a sportsman."

The poacher started; the word had its significance for him.

"Will the next transition," O'Neil went on, "be a return to the old pursuit—the turf?"

McDonald eyed his visitor keenly, and with a glance that for the moment puzzled him; it expressed no fear, not much surprise.

"Whoever you may be," he said, at length, "you evidently know me, and as evidently wish to impress me with a sense that your knowledge is important. Are you a detective—one of those dull, brutish curs, whose delight or profit is to make money of misery and sin, turn the repentance of an erring man back to its bitter source, and drive him on again to evil—are you?"

"What if I am?"

"Then the trouble you have taken in coming here is a waste of time, not unattended with danger to yourself."

The young Irishman laughed at that.

"A waste of time," he repeated; "not if I were what you suggest; but I am not one of those you rightly term dull, brutish curs, and it is not my purpose to touch upon the past. Far be it from me to stand in the way of your repentance, only I doubt its sincerity."

"Doubt or believe, as you may," said McDonald, in a tone of sullen defiance. "Do your worst, whatever your worst may be. I am past fear now; I might say that I have almost outlived humanity, for I have seen and suffered more than is the fate of humankind."

"There is a reason for this demeanor," thought O'Nell,

"and I must find it. Has this change, too, come with our friend, the chevalier?"

He gazed at the poacher, not without a certain sympathy. The man had suffered, and deeply; there were deep care-lines on his brow. The whole aspect of his face was world-wrung; if there were a touch of resignation upon it, it was the resignation of despair.

"McDonald," O'Neil said, throwing into his voice an irresistible softness, "I am so thoroughly acquainted with your history that I cannot but in a manner pity you; and, pitying the past as I do, I have no wish to interfere in any way with the future. I shall not molest you unless compelled."

"Why at all? We are strangers. I never injured you."

"A selfish, because an individual argument. We are not strangers, and the fact that you have not injured me is no reason that you never may. You are sufficiently a man of the world to understand that when interests clash, the one which has the weakest defense must come to grief."

"The world and I have parted long ago."

"To me it looks very much as if you were about to renew the acquaintance. There is some game afoot, McDonald, and you are connected with it. We will not deal in subterfuge."

"The whole tenor of your conduct is an enigma to me."

"Don't try to solve that enigma, my friend, but be as frank as I wish and tell the truth. You knew the Charnett family?"

"Too well."

"I would not for an instant implicate you, even by a thought, in the last episode; though, startling as it may seem to you, it would be a bad thing were you arrested and accused."

The poacher shuddered. The idea startled him.

"When the intelligent investigators were seeking the probable assassin, every one, strangely enough, overlooked a man who might at least have been an object of suspicion; and how that would be strengthened now, if you were found in possession of

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things that must have required money, and that are not found in the earth or rained from the sky."

- "Surely," said McDonald, whose brow began to sweat, "I am not suspected?"
- "As yet, no. But I, touching the barest margin of a strong supposition, should say that you could give a clew to the actual perpetrator."
 - "On my oath-my sacred oath-"
- "Hush, I I want no confidence. I say this, that tragedy is but the center of a plot planned with mighty subtlety, and partly executed with a devilish daring that will show in all which is to come. You are concerned with the rest."

McDonald was dumb in astonishment.

O'Neil left him no time for denial.

- "Recently, within the last few days since the murder, you have seen a stranger."
 - "A stranger!"
 - "The Chevalier de Buradoc."
 - "I never heard the namebefore."
 - "Well, then, Michael Ewrick."

The gentlemanly emissary of Monsieur Chicto saw that he was not mistaken.

The other did not attempt to negative the assertion, but sat without replying.

He was overwhelmed by the quiet stranger's perfect knowledge of an event which he thought known only to himself and Michael."

- "He gave you money," continued O'Neil, "and I want to know for what."
- "I cannot answer what I do not comprehend," said McDonald, determined to be on his guard; "you have arrived at such a strange conclusion that I wonder how it entered your mind."
- "I arrived at it simply by induction. The earl was dying, and his son Sydney came home. By a coincidence which, even in this age when marvels seem but ordinary things, was singu-

lar, Lord Sydney, with his wife and child, traveled from the Continent in the same train, and from Lockstone to Charnett in the same coach, with the chevalier, who, up to the time of their arrival at the lodge-gate, I believe really had not recognized his fellow-passengers. Well, then comes the murder."

"Why associate the chevalier, whom I do not know, with that?"

"By induction, as I said. See how the links rivet together; the chevalier is confessedly Michael Ewrick's nearest friend, and his mission was to see the earl; that being impossible, he, in Michael's behalf, will put in a claim to the Charnett estate."

McDonald now began to see his way more clearly; he guessed whose was the child he had to adopt.

"Did the chevalier say that?" he asked.

"Distinctly. He said what he did say with quite legal perspicuity. I never saw a foreigner undergo an examination with better grace. After Lord Sydney's death the chevalier came to you."

"Again I say I do not know the man."

"Michael Ewrick, then—the Chevalier de Buradoc, or the same man under any name; and he gave you money."

"What for?"

"That is just what I want to know, Mr. McDonald—exactly what you must tell me."

"Does it not strike you," said the poacher, more at his ease as he grew familiar with the other's presence, "that if I am his confederate, you are indiscreet in letting me into your confidence? I can warn him."

"But you will not," said O'Neil, with his white teeth parted in a smile that was a chilling menace; "for, see you, my dear poacher, captain, gentleman, and outlaw, I speak to you in good faith, and because I want your help. If I have not that, sorry as I shall be, we are foes."

"And then-"

[&]quot;Then," said O'Neil, "I, myself, will give into the hands of

some dull. brutish, but dangerous cur, a duelist who killed, a man who did a sacrilege, an unholy incendiarism——"

"Ha!" said McDonald, as he caught his gun from the wall, "that cursed secret, then, is mine no longer! You have hunted out a repentant, but desperate man. I wanted to bury all the bitter past—"

"Do," said Robert O'Neil, caressing his mustache; "but I have no wish to be interred with it. Put the gun down and resume your seat. Your hand shakes—you would miss me; my hand is steady—if my finger tightens on this trigger, the ball will penetrate your brain.

The left hand resting on his knee held a revolver, whose glittering barrel did not deviate a hair's breadth from its line, and his eye was fixed upon the poacher's like a still spark of fire.

It subdued him—he threw the gun aside with a groan—once more covered his haggard face.

"Go," he said, "if you have mercy, and let the wretched remnant of my life alone. Seek out what you will—I can say nothing; I am sworn by an oath, too terrible to break, not to betray our compact."

O'Neil put his revolver away.

- "McDonald," he said, placing his hand kindly upon the poacher's shoulder, "I have said before that I pity you—only upon a last emergency shall I touch the vail in which you have chosen to hide, but should that emergency come I must be pitiless. Others would be if I were not."
 - "But my oath?"
 - "Weigh between that and imprisonment—the scaffold."
- "Were both before me and a word would bring respite, I could not say it. I am bound to blind obedience, to act when I am bidden."
- "But come, you have a preliminary instruction—tell me it, and on my word, which I never break, you shall be safe—your secret shall go no further than it has gone already."

"This is the total of my instructions—I am to be on the alert for a cry."

"What cry?"

"A cuckoo's."

"So much gained," thought O'Neil, "a cuckoo's cry;" and he said, "I shall remember."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BULLET WITH A STEEL CORE.

During the few days that intervened between the inquest and the burial of Earl Charnett and his son, Michael Ewrick was more cautious in his work than he had intended to be.

In spite of his savage daring, his ruthless determination to follow out his track of crime to the bitter end, he could not but be sensible that there was much wisdom in Reuben Uxley's advice. The lawyer's keen, cool, far-seeing brain perceived the danger that would inevitably arise from a second deed so startling in its nature as the one Michael was resolved upon.

"So far we have done well," Uxley said, when endeavoring to dissuade Ewrick from his purpose, "but there is jeopardy in immediate further action. Success is a fault with men who know not how to use it."

"Which means-"

"That you are disposed to be reckless; I have seen a thing that troubles me. That gentleman, the stranger at the inquest, is a person of whom we should beware. The more I learn concerning him, the more I am convinced that his purpose in Charnett bodes no good to us. That quiet stranger is on the watch, I am sure of it."

"What cause have you to be sure?"

"The clearest evidence. He watches this house; every even-

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ing at sunset, he passes, as though apparently going for a stroll; and he is very curious about all particulars concerning the family of the Charnetts; he also cultivates the acquintance of John Kendrake."

- "How have you learned this?"
- "Simply by inquiry. Mr. Scofield, the host of the house at which our quiet friend is staying, is not remarkable for reticence when you once start him fairly on a subject."
 - "Do you know his name?"
 - "Robert O'Neil."
- "I have not heard it before," said Michael, thoughtfully; "but a name is nothing. I confess to a faint misgiving concerning him, for he is so singularly like the gentleman who went to eternity by way of the river Seine with a dagger through his throat."
- "Every day," continued Uxley, "since the—death of Earl Charnett, and——"

He hesitated.

- "Proceed," said Michael, quietly; "every day since thennot many have passed, however."
- "Mr. O'Neil has been to the forest-keeper's lodge," Uxley went on, chilled slightly by Michael's utter callousness, "which, for some inexplicable reason, is occupied by police—two there are on duty by day, and two to relieve guard at night. Strangers are denied admission; only John Kendrake and O'Neil have entered since."
 - "Well?"
- "He has searched the place minutely through and through, looking for relics of the dead, evidently."
 - "He will not find much," smiled Ewrick.
- "But there is the beginning of the clew in so little, and our friend has found something."
 - "What?" asked Michael, quickly.
- "Some portions of a metal cartridge-case and a bullet with a steel core. Mr. O'Neil, who is apparently an experienced

traveler, said that Lord Sydney had been shot with a metallic cartridge, one of a sort that is in use at a certain shooting-gallery in Paris."

Michael Ewrick's dark cheek paled.

"Malediction!" he muttered. "I never thought of that."

"Such trifles are dangerous things to overlook; the constables, however, did not seem to attach any importance to the statement—they let the gentleman have the bullet, in fact. But out of all who may hear of the affair there may be one or two less obtuse than the rest, and then, should the peculiar bullet from a French shooting-gallery be found in connection with a French gentleman—"

"I see; it was an oversight, indeed, and this Mr. O'Neil means more mischief than I thought. I must look to him."

"Clearly, it would tend to criminate the Chevalier de Buradoc," Uxley added; "and for anything further to happen while he remains in Charnett would be the height of imprudence."

Michael rested his heavy brow upon his hand in meditation.

"And then it would be wise to wait till the occurrence of some opportunity that might make the matter wear a natural aspect. To go in the night, like a thief, and steal the little girl would show a deliberate motive, which, put together with what is to come afterward, the repudiation of Lady Leonora's right to the titles of wife or heiress, would strengthen suspicion and bring it full upon the new claimant—on Michael Ewrick?"

"No suspicion would be tenable—my plans are too well laid."

"Do not be sure of that. You rely upon your present incognito; now the very mystery you have thrown around your-self may give birth to a danger. So many characters as you assume, so do the chances of recognition increase; the point at which these characters merge can always be traced. For our common safety it is imperative the premeditated deed shall be set aside for the present."

"Till after the funeral."

"Till there is a good opportunity—till I have ascertained more of Mr. O'Neil's purposes in Charnett. It is certain that on the evening of the inquest, Mr. O'Neil went to the railway station, at Lockstone, and sent a telegram. His movements touched my curiosity, so I made a few inquiries in a merely The telegraphic clerk at Lockstone obtained casual manner. his place by my interest, and having little else to do than to nibble his pen and read novels he is given to speculating about his few customers. He informed me that on the evening of the inquest a stranger, Mr. O'Neil by his description, went to the station and wrote a message. It was, from what I could understand, done in cipher or some peculiar effort of stenography. By the singularity of the message and the liberality of its sender, the clerk set the former down as an incendiary piece of secret correspondence, and the latter as a red Bourbonist, a deadly conspirator at the mildest."

"Then he told you the contents, the substance of the telegram?"

"No. Mr. O'Neil, who never runs a risk by an oversight, went back for the message just as my informant had started a theory of elucidation from the obscurest corner of his brain; he gave it up—the message—reluctantly, and the theory went with it; but he remembered the address—'To Monsieur Gustave Chicto, Paris.'"

Every fiber in Michael Ewrick's frame strung itself to its tension. The effect upon him was electrical; he seemed to rise beyond his height in pure dismayed surprise.

"To Gustave Chicto?" he iterated, with a pallor on his brow and a hoarse whispering in his throat. "Why, then, the river must have given up its dead, and I have a foe like Satan, so stealthy, so bitter, so terrible; but if it be a battle, a test of strength, nerve, sublety, and skill, I will fight it inch by inch with him. To Gustave Chicto? Then he has penetrated my disguise, and could denounce me when he wished. That, however, is not his purpose, and I am well forewarned."

- "Not his purpose?"
- "You could not understand," said Michael, "even were I to explain the feeling that will actuate this man; he could meet me, smile, eat, and drink with me, and all the while be thinking of his revenge. He will not attempt to stay my career."
 - "A dangerous foe, then?"
- "A demon," said Michael. "Deadly, and cool, and quiet, patient, tireless, and sure. Why, he would watch with ecstasy my success in everything, see me build up piece by piece, as it were, all the glorious fabric of my future; and then in the meridian of my triumph, when I had the topmost pinnacle of my ambition within my touch, it would be his delight to strike and bring the whole toppling down to crush me in its ruin."
- "I have a deeply-rooted mistrust of very quiet people," said Uxley, "that is why I made it my business to watch him."
- "He swore to be my fate, and he will keep his word if I give him the chance."
 - "I think you fear the man."
- "I confess without shame," said Michael, with an oath, "that in him there is something which goes beyond me; he is inscrutable, quick to devise, prompt to act, always on the alert, never taken off his guard, and in no emergency does he lose nerve."
 - "It is, think you, the same?"
- "Must be; what you have told me proves beyond a doubt his purpose here. He is the man I thought buried in the slime of the Seine, and his escape from that death makes him an object of greater peril. In Paris he was called the Sin Phantom. Were we alone in a dark place, no witness, and no danger of discovery, my pistol in a line with his heart or brain, and my finger on the trigger——"
 - "He would die."
- "No; were he to look me in the face, meet me eye to eye, my hand would tremble—I should miss him. There is a power within him that quells me, though I fight against it. I could

face a horde of savages and defy them all, but face to face with him I am completely nerveless."

- "The stronger reason that there should be a barrier between you until something happens to him or you. Conquer that fear."
- "Time and destiny will prove," said Ewrick, moodily. "No barrier but the grave will stand between him and me; my enemies are not fortunate, as a rule, and I shall dig a pitfall for him yet."
- "We will hope so," was the lawyer's Christian wish. "Do you now perceive the necessity for extra caution?"
 - "Ouite."
 - "And you will attend the funeral?"
 - "I had better."
- "It would look more graceful and unobtrusive were you to attend at the burial service without seeking an introduction to the lady."
 - "Perhaps it would."
- "And in the other matter—that of repudiating the Lady Leonora's claim, and instituting your own—it would be best to let me arrange. Make it a legal matter between me, as solicitor to Michael Ewrick, and Messrs. Pentland & Snell, solicitors to the late Lord Sydney."
- "So be it; I long for the time to speed, and I shall not rest till every barrier that keeps me from Leonora is swept away. When will the funeral take place?
 - "To-morrow,"
- "I shall be there. The way to her will seem more clear when the vault has closed over him; and Charnett, the proud old place, my ancestral home, it will be mine—it will be mine."

CHAPTER XII.

Satisfied that Michael would abide by his counsel, the lawyer felt more at ease. He had a keen regard for his own personal welfare, which he knew would stand in a position of some considerable risk should anything arise in the shape of danger to the Chevalier de Buradoc.

"The Charnett estate will be yours," he said. "I have no doubt of it; and I have promised that it shall be so."

Michael held out his hand—the one with which he had slain his victim, and Uxley took it.

"You have some motive," Ewrick said, "other than that of such pecuniary reward as may attend our success for the interest you take in me."

"I have said," Uxley answered, quietly, "there were some old ties between me and your mother."

"What were they?"

A shadow came upon the lawyer's hard and usually impassive countenance.

"It's a story of the past," he said, and I do not care to tell it. I touch an old wound—a deep one."

"The recollection pains you."

"Here"—Uxley struck his breast—"strange as it may seem, I had a heart." His tone was like a sneer at himself. "Not then a dry and withered thing like this."

He crumpled a piece of faded parchment in his hand. The action had its significance. If Michael smiled, it was not for want of sympathy, but at the professional nature of the implied simile.

And Uxley—whom the inhabitants of Charnett called old Reuben, and pitied, as simple-hearted people are apt to pity those who are supposed never to have cared or been cared for by a

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human being—spoke with much feeling, though his voice had only the ordinary conversational monotone.

"Your mother," he went on, and the word lingered with tenderness on his tongue, "was one of the few who ever gave me credit for possessing that unnecessary organ, and if ever in my loneliness, my poor obscurity, I had a welcome thought it was of her."

- "How long have you known Charnett?"
- "Five-and-thirty years."
- "Then you were acquainted with my mother before she married?"
- "While she was Miss Agnes Brewer, a beautiful and frank, fair girl, whom every one adored, the finest horsewoman that ever rode to the Limport meet."
 - "She had many suitors?"
- "Many. But when the Charnett brothers, Colonel Ewrick-"
 - "My father," Michael interposed.
- "And his brother Cecil," said Uxley, assenting to the other's last remark. "When they took the field, the rest retired; for they were proud, those Charnetts, with their hot Norman blood and dark, impetuous dispositions. Lord Cecil, though a youth of twenty, horsewhipped Sir William Warden, the present baronet's cousin, for questioning his right to her hand at a ball. So they were not the sort of rivals to interfere with."

"I think some deviltry of nature is part of our inheritance," said Michael, listening with a proud kind of pleasure to the recital. "I could not even in childhood, brook control."

"The Charnetts never could. However, the two were left without a rival, and the lady's choice lay between them, but she dared not make it. I believe her inclination lay with Cecil, and she would not say it for fear."

"Leaving them to decide."

"They did so, and it was whispered—mind, only whispered—that when the colonel spoke with Cecil on the subject, claim-

ing, by his birthright, that she should be resigned to him, Lord Cecil laughed, and said no power on earth could break the tie between them."

- "Then?" Michael said, a hot flush reddening his cheek.
- "Then," said Uxley, "they were parted, for they were at violence. The old earl ordered Cecil to his room, and the colonel back to his regiment."
 - "Did he go?"
- "No; next day came the tragedy. Lord Cecil was found at midnight dead on Charnett . eath, killed by poachers, so said rumor—shot by his brother, ... said rumor also."
- "In each case rumor was a liar," Michael said. "Lord Cecil Lois, of Charnett, was shot by the steward, Stephen Lester."

Uxley made a gesture of assent, and did not change a feature.

- "He deserved his death," Michael added, "for a boast that set the seal of dishonor on a woman, a brand of infamy on me. Proceed."
- "I introduced myself here," said Reuben Uxley; "I had in some way—it does not matter how, since the details are unimportant—gained Miss Brewer's esteem. My practice here was very meager at first; it began to improve only when I acted for her father, one of the largest landholders in Limport. Then came my connection with the legal matters of the Charnetts."
 - "Beginning with-"
- "Mortgage deeds, by which, bit by bit, the colonel parted with his birthright to Lord Robert. Well, the shock of Cecil's death killed the old earl. In this there is a strong resemblance between that tragedy and the one just consummated."
 - "Great events invariably repeat themselves."
- "One more of the strange mysteries that seem to come with each generation of this family attended Cecil's fate. The body was discovered by a villager, who gave the alarm, and a party went to fetch it. Not an hour elapsed; but when they reached the spot, Lord Cecil's corpse was gone. It is presumed that the

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assassins, still lurking near the spot, though possibly ignorant that the deed had been discovered, removed and buried their victim."

- "We cannot entertain that supposition."
- "We can form none, save that he was buried."
- "By his slayer, the steward, then-Stephen Lester?"
- "Be that as it may, the mystery remains unsolved. We come to the next episode. Within a week, while conjecture was still at work regarding Lord Cecil, Miss Brewer rode out, attended by her groom as usual. She took her lover's death quietly; she dared show no sign of sorrow. Her horse took fright, and ran with her into Charnett Heath; it was near nightfall." Michael began to breathe heavily.
- "The groom, utterly outstripped in speed, lost sight of her, and, after vainly riding about for hours, returned to Limport, thinking his mistress might have regained control of her steed, and reached home before him. Such was not the case.
- "Her friends going out in eager search were baffled by an awful tempest—a wild storm of long duration, such as had not swept over Charnett for many a year.
- "While it raged, a young lawyer, a poor wretch who had to win his bread by much fatigue, was crossing the heath. He sought refuge in a hut; it was built for the forest watchers, and is now occupied by Simon McDonald."

Ewrick, whose powerful chest heaved and fell, motioned the narrator to continue.

"He had not been there long when two others entered—a man leading in a lady in a riding-habit. The lawyer crouched away in an inner room; adversity and early experience had taught him caution; he hid, watched, and listened."

"Good," said Michael; "now for a truth that lifts a weight even from my soul, and makes one deed at least a just retribution—a deed of vengeance for a mother wronged most bitterly; I would that she had lived, Reuben Uxley; you know how I loved her."

- "I do; but to my story. The man barred and barricaded the hut; there was dark and evil purpose on his face; the lady trembled at him, and with good cause.
- "You know the race from which this man sprang—its vast physical strength—its firm, uncontrollable will."
 - "He was a Charnett, then?" Michael said.
- "Colonel Ewrick; and the lady, I need not say, was Agnes Brewer; he had saved her life—rescued her from the horse."
 - "He had better, perhaps, have left her to die."
- "I heard her say so before the storm was over—before the peaceful dawn brought its light to that wretched hovel—to a desolate girl, a revengeful man, and the affrighted witness; for while the rafters shook beneath the thunder, there was perpetrated a crime—dastardly, unholy, cruel."

Michael wiped huge beads of sweat from his temples.

- "He had often knelt to her, he said, supplicating for her love, a tithe of that she had so freely given to another—the dead brother—the dead rival—and he swore that by the morning she should kneel and supplicate to him."
- "In my infancy," said Michael, with sardonic bitterness, "I called that man my father."
- "He taunted her with the memory of her guilty love, her willing infamy for Cecil—shall I go on, Michael, or let you guess the rest?"
 - "Go on," said Michael, hoarsely, "go on."
- "She went on her knees, and by her hope of salvation asked Heaven to attest her innocence, her purity. He laughed—I have heard you laugh like him, Michael—like that."

The short, hard, mirthless sound which at this point broke from Ewrick's lips was such a sound as might break from a wounded beast of prey.

"The morning saw her, as he said, upon her knees, supplicating his pity, asking help for her broken honor, mercy for her shame, and from him, her destroyer."

"You," said Michael, rising, quivering in intense excite-

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ment, "you heard her cries for help, and raised no hand; you heard her prayer for mercy, and said no word; were you so cowardly, so brutish, as not to try to serve her? Speak!"

"He would have brained me like a strengthless rat; could a tattered jackdaw stand between a vulture and his quarry?"

"True, true; but possessing this terrible knowledge---"

"I used it; I knew his need. He scoffed at, mocked her.

"Give me a name,' she said, 'that I may lift my head and face my sisterhood, for my father's sake, for mine, and I forgive you."

"And what said he?"

"This: 'Give me my brother whom I have slain because of a cursed doubt; give me the time so lately gone when I had not risked perdition for revenge and passion.'

"And she, kneeling still with outstretched hands, said:

""He was my husband, and I his bride—a wife, yet not a wife."

"Then he, reeling, staggering, stricken, saw the meaning of Lord Cecil's words:

"'No power on earth could break the tie between them."

"This revelation seems to stun me," Michael said, slowly. "Nothing more strange can be told in the black, unwritten records of our house."

"But the deep love he had borne her seemed to turn to hate, and he told her that for the crime which was indirectly at his door, because of her, she should suffer bitterly. And so she did. He gave her a name, but her life was a long day of misery. He kept her shame untold and made her his wife. I compelled that. I told him my secret, how I knew his crime, and would proclaim it should he refuse her justice. He yielded. They were married; her union with Lord Cecil was never known, and only the clergyman and witnesses were aware of that with the colonel. He took her abroad with him; she never went home again till she came home to die."

"Never went home?"

- "No; he kept her in Charnett House for two days, and they were wedded in the chapel on the estate; it was at night, and at night they departed. We, the witnesses, were sworn to secrecy."
 - "Were you one?"
- "I was, and I kept the proofs for her sake, in case anything should arise. I have them now."
- "Why, then," said Michael, wild with exultation, "when my worthy uncle tempted a wretch to burn the chapel and destroy all testimony, he did a useless sin. I thank you for this, Reuben, from my soul I thank you; the blistering word Earl Robert and my tather flung into my teeth can be proved a lie."
- "I have said so. And now if you wonder why I have been faithful to you and to her name, here is the cause; her bounty kept me from hunger; her gentle kindness won her father's sympathy for me, and he was the only one who did not treat me like a dog. I did repay her, Michael."
- "Devotedly. Old man, I did not think you had so much fidelity."
- "She came to me when Colonel Ewrick, in his jealous fury, recalled the old taunt, and said he had married her in pity for her shame—when he repudiated her and fixed a false stigma upon you I told her how at any hour she wished I could prove her right, and she said:
- "'I can die in peace, for I know it. If my son is what I think he is, he will prove it."
- "As," Michael said, "I have sworn. The shame they put on me and on her—my father, my uncle, and my cousin Sydney— I will repay in kind. His—Lord Sydney's wife—shall suffer as my mother suffered."
 - "My part of the story is told. You know the rest."
- "Ay, how my sire punished her for the crime he had committed, how he used her with stern and brutal callousness, chilling back the love that would have grown, for the ties of instinct and of habit are so powerful that she did learn to love

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him. How he let her cherish me till I grew very dear to her; and how, just when she most wanted and could have valued my affection, he sent me away to be brought up with strangers; to see her never more, so he intended."

"He had a sinister nature."

"I thank him for his work," said Ewrick, with a flash of glowing fire. "He called me viper—spurned me, and the viper stung him."

"It was terrible. Kindred against kindred, sire against son, son against sire, and brother against brother; it has ever been so with the Charnetts."

"It was just. Terrible as my deeds may seem, I have done no worse than has been done me. And now these proofs, Reuben, let me see them."

Uxley went to a ponderous iron chest, and produced a small casket. It contained a certificate of marriage between Agnes Brewer, of Limport, and Ewrick Lois, Earl of Charnett."

M chael's eye lit on the last line like a flame.

- "A peculiar document," he said. "Up to the date of this my father had not bartered his birthright."
 - "No"
 - "Who were parties to the final transaction?"
- "They were the same to all. Lord Robert and Colonel Lord Ewrick, principals; Lord Cecil, myself, and Doctor Hamilton, witnesses."
 - "Doctor Hamilton?"
 - "He who is now at Charnett House. He knows all?"
- "It may be the worse for him. Answer this—the documents of the transfer you hold are the only set in existence?"
 - "No. Doctor Hamilton has copies complete."
 - "S'death. Does he keep them?"

Uxley shook his head gravely.

"Messrs. Pentland & Snell, Lord Sydney's solicitors, have them."

"One might think the very fiends were at work to baffle

me," said Michael, savagely, "for at every step a new obstacle rises in the way."

"Fear not," exclaimed Uxley; "fear nothing. Step by step we meet obstacles, and one by one they will fall. When none more perilous in nature than the other documents are in your way, I will say, 'Welcome Earl Michael, Master of Charnett."

CHAPTER XIIL

THE CUCKOO'S CRY.

Never within the memory of Charnett's simple dwellers had such a somber day loomed over the quiet village as that which saw the sable cavalcade on its way to the old church.

It was no idle curiosity to gaze upon a stately spectacle that lined the Charnett road with followers. The stern old earl had been kind to his tenants. Lord Sydney they remembered as a frank, generous boy, and their humble tribute of respect was paid to each alike, out of respect for the one, affection to the other

The son forgiven and the sire reconciled too late were soon to be side by side in peace at last—all bitterness gone—pride, ambition, passion at rest with them. No evil tongue or evil thought could keep them asunder longer; the love-chain broken in life, was linked again in eternity.

The whole spectacle was singularly impressive. The hearse that bore the earl went first, and then the hearse that bore his murdered son. John Kendrake walked behind this, bare-headed, and so close that the black plumes drooped over his head. He only wore a funeral cloak over his usual garb; the common drapery of woe would have seemed a mockery to the great grief at his heart.

The old gray church was thronged when the procession reached

its destination. A silent, sympathetic congregation received the sorrowing lady and her little child. Many a tear was shed for her whose sweet, sad face was a strangely fair infantile miniature of her mother's. For Leonora, all sympathy was mixed with awe.

Her dark, grave beauty, more statuesque and regal in this her time of desolation, made her look like a prophetess; and like a prophetess she knelt before the altar when each coffin, carried by six stalwart men, was placed upon its bier. She made no sign, and scarcely seemed to breathe while the solemn service was read; her hands were clasped, her brow upturned, and her prayerful eyes fixed upon a picture of the Holy Martyrdom.

It would have been better had she wept; her tearless quietude spoke no source of sorrow. It did not tell of dull, stunned lethargy; the keen, quick, vivid anguish at her soul had set its mark on every pallid lineament.

The service ended, the bearers took their burdens again. Out of the dim church they went, and to the vault. Yet no word, no sign or sob from Leonora. She waited till the palls were removed—till her husband's father and her husband were on their final resting-place, and then she pressed her lips to Sydney's coffin-lid, sank to her knees, and prayed.

Kendrake let her remain there a while. He took his place near to her as friend and guardian with a quiet, reverential dignity that made men wonder. Leonora left the vault with him, her hand upon his arm. The ponderous door rolled back with a cold, heavy clang, and starting with a sharp thrill then, her gaze fell full on the countenance of a stranger, who stood there with uncovered head.

They had met before. John Kendrake felt her clutch tighter. Surely some inward instinct must have filled her with a sickening fascination, for the stranger seemed to magnetize her.

He bowed with grave respect, and turned away without speaking. The forest-keeper met his parting glance, and returned it. "Who is that man?" asked Leonora, in a whisper,

- "The Chevalier de Buradoc," Kendrake said.
- "I shiver at him; there is an association of strange thought. I remember him."
 - "Where?"
 - "In Paris; here—at the gate when we came home."

Her glance followed the chevalier, who was now passing through the church-yard gate. Mr. Robert O'Neil was there.

They were not separated by the distance of a yard when O'Neil dropped something as if accidentally; it rolled to the chevalier's feet.

"Your pardon," said O'Neil; "don't tread upon it."

He picked it up with care. Had Michael Ewrick trod suddenly with naked foot upon an adder he could not have been more startled; even his wondrous nerve could not withstand the shock of being touched so unexpectedly by the bullet he had sent through his victim's head.

A moment and Michael had regained his self-possession. He bowed to O'Neil and went his way.

"I would not have it crushed for the world," the young Irishman observed quietly to a respectable old gentleman at his elbow; "it is a relic."

The respectable old gentleman to whom this information wasvolunteered recoiled with a gesture of curious fear.

- "A relic?" he echoed, involuntarily.
- "Some trifles," said O'Neil, "that have no intrinsic worth, derive a special value under peculiar circumstances. This I found in a pillar of the doorway at the forest-keeper's lodge."

The old gentleman surveyed it with interest.

- "It has two peculiarities," said O'Neil.
- "Really."
- "One is a steel core, you perceive; that is why the shape is to some extent retained."
 - "I see," assented the old gentleman, uneasily.

The young Irishman grew confidential, pressed his forefinger on the other's shoulder, and whispered in his ear:

"It is the ball with which Lord Sydney Lois of Charnett was assassinated."

The respectable old gentleman shrank from the oppressive forefinger, and rolled back against the stonework of the gate.

"What a shocking thing to keep," he said. "Should it not be in the hands of the authorities?"

"I shall make better use of it than they," said O'Neil. "Are you a resident here?"

"My name is Uxley—Reuben Uxley. I have lived in Charnett five-and-thirty years."

O'Neil lifted his hat.

"Suffer me to offer my card. I am fond of local history," he added, with perfect gravity, "and should be happy to receive a little information from a gentleman who by right of long residence must have the nearest possible claims to the honor of being the oldest inhabitant."

The lawyer coughed.

"As solicitor to the Charnett family," he said, "I should be happy to receive any item of information respecting the sad occurrence that you, as a gentleman evidently interested, could give me."

"I shall have much pleasure, and the few particulars I have learned might throw a light on the mystery."

Both remained hat in hand. At this moment two carriages, one occupied by Leonora and her child, the other by John Kendrake and Doctor Hamilton, went past them.

"One word," said Uxley, as O'Neil was turning away; "may I request you not to mention that little matter until you have seen me?"

"The bullet?-I will not."

"It is not generally known.

"Only to the two constables, you, Mr. Kendrake, and myself."

"I wonder the constables did not keep it."

"Why? The inquiry is over, the verdict recorded—that Lord

Sydney was slain by a bullet was satisfactorily proved; the fact that the bullet is not an ordinary one would not be sufficient to re-open the inquiry."

"True, Mr. O'Neil. When may I expect the favor of a visit."

"In a day or two. Is it not strange—pardon the suggestion—that you did not take part in the procession?"

"I have been engaged upon important business for the family. My attendance as a formal mourner would have been a mere matter of courtesy. My regard is shown by my work."

"Ay, that is it; deeds, Mr. Uxley, not outward signs or empty words; true feeling is shown, as you say, by the work done."

"He does not think I know him so well," thought the lawyer, as O'Neil went up the lane. "I felt the force of the last remark; Michael must be with me when our friend comes to glean some local history; I never resort to extreme measures, except in extreme cases—never."

Though the lawyer's fertile brain went to work upon the instant, weaving a web in which he hoped to ensnare O'Neil, he could not drive away a strong misgiving. There was mischief meant, danger not far in the distance, from this member of Chicto's league.

That the bullet had fallen at Michael's feet by design, and not by accident, was apparent to Uxley, who had witnessed the incident; he also entertained a firm belief that O'Neil was perfectly acquainted with his name and profession when he addressed Uxley as though speaking to a stranger. So he said to Michael when, later in the day, they were speaking of the morning's event.

"Curse him!" Ewrick said, between his teeth; "but we shall thwart him, subtle as he is. What he did this morning was a warning to us both; we may expect no mercy."

"None; your quiet, genial man, with careless grace of man-

ner, is of foes the one to be most dreaded. He is coming here."

"Here?"

"In a day or two; we formed acquaintance," Uxley said, with a grimace. "He said I had by right of long residence the nearest possible claim to the honor of being the oldest inhabitant. He has a taste for local history, and I am anxious to learn the few additional particulars he has gained regarding the deed at the lodge."

"So the purport of his visit is interchange of information." Uxley nodded an affirmative; he was meditating.

"Nothing could be done here," he said, after a pause.

"Nothing; though this is a queer old house, and has, I dare say, many a hiding-place."

Reuben Uxley changed color and glanced keenly at the speaker. The remark may or may not have been thrown out at random. Michael's face was inscrutable.

"In the days of Cromwell," Ewrick said, "if I remember an old Charnett legend rightly, this house was occupied by an ancient Jew, who had a virtue common alike to his tribe and to Gentiles—he hoarded money."

The color, which had begun to return in Uxley's cheek, went back again.

"Some of the Puritans—a godly crew—who sang hymns while they slaughtered, wanted to relieve the Jew of care. Two troopers were quartered here, and they sought for the store. The old man, under persuasion—a sword made hot and pinked into his body—told them where it was—down a disused well, to which access was gained through the floor in one of the rooms. So a trooper descended; his comrade held a light for him. You can finish the story."

"The old Jew stumbled against the trooper with the light," said Uxley, "and the trap-door closed."

"The son of Abraham, fearing they might mistake the accident for violence on his part, thought it best to let matters re-

main as they were," concluded Michael, "and the troopers were supposed to have deserted. The well kept its secret."

- "And the old man's gold."
- "Where is the well?"
- "Under your feet."
- "S'death!"

Michael moved his chair.

- "I could send you to the bottom in a moment," said Uxley; "or let you down gradually, like a stage-phantom, with your feet upon the trap as on a platform. Shall I show you how?"
- "Thank you, no. Such experiments may be interesting, but my mind has no bias that way. Was it not understood that you had the well bricked up?"
- "So I did," Uxley said; "but I thought such a facility should not be entirely lost, and I unbricked it again."
 - "Troublesome work."
- "It was worth the trouble; I did not want every gaping fool in Charnett to be continually talking about the old well in the lawyer's house. Rumor had already set it abroad that he kept gold hidden there. People think me a miser.
 - "They are of course in error."
- "Quite; although I see you share the idea. But my habit, my thrift and industry should teach you better—to keep money idle is as silly as to waste it. However, my having the well bricked up ended all surmise."
 - "That you have it again in its old state is a secret, then?"
 - "It is; why do you recall the story?"
- "I was thinking that if our friend O'Neil should come and chance to sit where I was sitting just now, you might try the experiment on him."

The lawyer rubbed his heavily-wrinkled brow in troubled thought. After a few moments, Ewrick broke in upon the lawyer's meditations by saying:

- "To-day I take the next step in our work."
- "So soon? The child?"

"No; the will. The one that is not wanted—the one in Sydney's favor—which should have been destroyed. I wonder you let it escape you."

"It was too closely watched."

"No matter; Stephen Lester is a serviceable spy. I caught his eye to-day at the funeral, and by the sign he made there is something to be done to-night. I told him what I desired when I saw him last; perhaps he has got it tor me."

Uxley shook his head.

"I should think not; the lady would keep that."

"We shall see."

The lawyer was correct in his conjecture. The will made in Lord Sydney's favor before he incurred his father's anger, and which the old earl's declaration on his dying bed made a sacæd deed of love, Leonora cherished with care; it was hallowed by the sire's touch—he had said it was for Sydney after all.

So Leonora wore it in her breast, obeying one of the strange, fanciful impulses that come of sorrow and cause the bereaved to set much store on any relic of the dead; it was the token of Earl Robert's forgiveness—it was proof of her child's birthright.

To ascertain that it was kept in such a resting-place was not a difficult matter to Stephen Lester; he had not the fertile strategy of those with whom he was in direct and indirect complicity—a simpler craft and astute cunning given him by nature served his purpose quite as well.

One of the female servants—an affectionate, unsophisticated girl—had attached herself to Leonora from the first. Sorrow is quick to catch at and cling to unobtrusive sympathy, and Leonora repaid the girl's attachment in her own royal way.

So becoming as she did her ladyship's favorite attendant, this girl had ample opportunities of watching her mistress. She mentioned innocently enough any little act on Leonora's part that struck her fancy.

"The poor lady did love him dearly," she had said one evening when the domestics were gathered together in the servants' hall; "the very ground he walked upon, and everything he touched. She values even the will that the earl made about him."

"Why?" another had asked.

"Because it was meant for Lord Sydney after all," said the girl, "and that looked like forgiveness, I suppose."

A few more questions—suggested apparently with mere curiosity by Stephen Lester—elicited all he wanted to know. The information thus derived he gave to Michael Ewrick.

He, going from the lawyer's house after their recent conversation, went within earshot of the house, and took up his position near a shadowy clump of trees. The next moment a low, monotonous bird-note—a cuckoo's cry—was heard distinctly on the evening air.

The steward knew what it meant. He strolled from the mansion toward the trees.

"Stephen Lester."

The voice sounded so near that it startled him. He turned; the tall, fine form and handsome face of Michael confronted him.

"Briefly," Ewrick said, "and walk while we speak. What of the other?"

"The will—that one which, if it were the only one, would make you master here? It is where it was."

"In the old cabinet?"

"Into which I have found the way. It will offer no resistance."

"Good! Be prepared."

"When?"

"At midnight. A rope from her window will do. If all is safe, let me see a light in yours."

"A rope from her window?"

The steward trembled as though he stood upon the brink of a terrible danger. He could not but read the sinister fire of the other's glittering eye.

"From hers," said Michael, under his breath. "You need not fear. I shall risk nothing, even in the face of such temptation. Now return, and do not forget—at midnight."

"You will be here?"

"Listen for the signal-I shall not fail."

"But will a single rope suffice?"

"I have scaled an eagle's eyrie with one slender cord, and that so worn that hardy mountaineers have quaked to see me. Go—and remember."

Michael strode away with a gloomy smile on his proud lip. The old church clock struck twelve. A pale moon shining with fitful faintness in the somber sky cast a dull light on the shadowy heights of Charnett House. The wind that swept glebe and forest had never sung so sadly to his ear.

"It is time," muttered Michael Ewrick.

And from the clump of trees he watched Stephen Lester's window. The cuckoo's note he uttered went far across the gloom of Charnett Heath.

The light shone, flashed twice across the glass, and disappeared.

"Now," he said, in a low, hoarse whisper; "now."

Swiftly, stealthily, like a tiger, and as savage in purpose, he crept to the wall beneath Leonora's casement.

The rope was there.

Resolute and ruthless in his own evil work, he was too fearless to suspect treachery from the lesser miscreant he employed. Not a fear, not a misgiving troubled him as he seized the end of the rope and began to climb.

The lamp-glow, showing with dusky richness through the crimson curtains, enabled him to discern the slight fastening that held the lattice.

Clinging with one hand to the trailing ivy, he knelt upon the sill, and opening a broad, keen dagger-knife with his teeth, forced back the hasp.

Then—a phantom could not have trod more noiselessly—he entered Leonora's chamber.

There was a death-like hush throughout the house death had so lately left. The night-intruder could hear his own heart beat, every suffocating breath with which his massive chest heaved and sank.

The lady lay in stirless sleep—her pallid beauty wearing the aspect of marble under the somber hangings of her bed. One magnificent arm was coiled—white and bare almost to the shoulder—round the fragile form of little Alice.

A thick, choking feeling rose to Michael's throat. A world of black, hot, burning passion swam to his humid eyes, and then, stealing on tiptoe toward her with the old, fierce, dangerous devil, flooding a raging madness into heart and brain, he stood and gazed, as Tarquin must have gazed upon Lucretia.

"To look upon her thus," he said, shaping his chaos of wild thoughts into a voiceless whisper, "be here alone, and she quite helpless, to stand like this and quiver through and through with a sense like death's dearest agony! Oh, to crush her in my arms—let my lips cling to hers, and see her eyes kindle like stars with a feeling kindred to that which rages here—it is madness—madness, Leonora!"

The word was whispered involuntarily—she stirred.

He heard a sound—the signal—a faint, long, and monotonous cry; it turned him from his passion to his purpose.

Not an instant too soon; the lady slumbering heavily after her weary trial did not wake, but little Alice did. She would have shrieked had not the savage menace of his gesture frozen her into silent terror.

One step took him to the cabinet; he raised the ponderous lid, drew forth the second will, and placed a folded parchment in its stead. Then while the child still lay mute, his daring hand went like a sacrilege through the white robe Leonora wore over her whiter breast. He felt the silken case.

To take the will from it and substitute the other was a mo-

ment's work; he put the silken receptacle back to its restingplace, and though the unhallowed hand touched her, Leonora did not wake to blight him with the outraged anger of her glance.

Again he heard the cuckoo's cry.

Well for him, well for the unconscious lady, that it came to warn him. The demon of his soul was growing conquerless; but he dared not stay. Yet before he went he gave way to a resistless impulse, and swooping like an eagle to its prey, he set his mouth to hers.

Had the act hurled him into the red depths of perdition he would have dared it. Could time be annihilated by intensity of sense, the moment that he clung drinking rapture from her rich, humid lips, would have been a full share of human existence. He left her, reeling, staggering, with heart, and soul, and brain swimming in a worse than drunken dose.

And still she did not wake.

Not till little Alice buried her face in the pillow, and so with her spell-bound faculties released from the stranger's terrible look, gave a sharp, piercing shriek.

Then Leonora's slumber was broken.

Michael had reached the window; but the lady saw him! a black mask hid his countenance, yet she recognized him by instinct.

Her voice rang out:

"Help! help! John Kendrake, he is here!"

The cry was answered.

The keeper, who occupied an adjacent room, and had fallen asleep over his book, sprang up at the first sound. His gun was in his hand, and, dashing through corridor and state room, he reached her chamber.

"At the window!" Leonora said—"look for him there!—or is it some terrible dream?"

So, indeed, it seemed.

Nothing but Michael Ewrick's wondrous nerve could have

served him in such a crisis. He shut the window with a swift and steady hand; the hasp sprang back to its place, and the curtains falling into folds, left all as before.

Then he slid half-way down the rope. He could go no further, for the window opened, and his life depended on his stillness. He crouched with bated breath against the dark wall and the ivy, while Kendrake, with his gun glistening in the moonlight, peered into the gloom.

His keen eye, accustomed as it was to the dull night, could detect nothing. It did not catch sight of the rope; and Michael's form in its dark dress looked only like a shapeless shadow on the ivy leaves.

"A dream," he said, closing the casement—"a dream, my lady; there is nothing here."

"Dreams can be strangely real, then," Leonora said. "The face was masked, but the man—there was about him that unutterable distinctiveness which can never be mistaken—it was the Chevalier de Buradoc."

John Kendrake, white as ashes, leaped to the window again. This time he took the lamp, and threw its light downward in a direct line.

"Ha!" he said: "it was no dream!"

The lamp dashed aside, his weapon leveled, aimed with an eye that never erred, and with an iron finger on the trigger, there was nothing but forty yards of space between death and the stranger in the mask.

He had reached the ground, and was about to speed away, when the click of Kendrake's gun-lock made him pause. He turned; the mask fell, and left bare a beardless face—handsome, mocking, defiant, demoniac, and smiling.

"Here!" he said, pointing with one finger to his breast—
"here! fire! you cannot kill!"

His sardonic laugh sounded unearthly.

John Kendrake dropped his gun, with a groan of bitter, sorrowful despair.

"My oath!" he muttered, in a hoarse whisper, unheard by Leonora; "my oath! it was sworn to the dead—I cannot break it. To my poor sister I swore never to raise my hand against her betrayer, and I must keep my oath!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISION OF THE DRAD.

There was wild excitement in Charnett House that night. The alarm spread from one domestic to the other till all were roused and thronging to the scene.

Kendrake admitted one—Mary Naylor, Leonora's favorite attendant—to the chamber. He closed the door upon the rest.

Stephen Lester, who still retained the post of steward—a merely nominal authority—now was the most anxious to know what had taken place, and to offer his services.

The keeper cut him short sternly.

- "I can depend on you. Take two of the best men and follow him who fled. Bring him back if you find him—bring him back, alive or dead; but be careful, for he is no ordinary robber."
 - "Did you miss him?" asked the steward.
- "I did not fire," said Kendrake, looking nis interrogator in the face, "or I could not have missed him; but taking a human life is a serious thing, and a better purpose will be served by his capture."

Lester changed color.

"Perhaps," the keeper added, "he may be induced to tell the name of his accomplice—the man who set the rope by which he ascended to her ladyship's room."

The steward retired, muttering something about pursuit; he did not care to face John Kendrake's searching glance.

Bingham selected two of his fellow-servants to accompany him, and set out on the search with a fixed resolution to find the daring intruder, if possible, and bring him back alive or dead. Others of the household started forth to scour the estate in every direction.

Kendrake went back to his room, his fine features singularly grave and thoughtful. He expected to be sent for by Leonora, but was altogether unprepared for her visit.

"Come in," he said, in answer to her gentle rap at his door, and she entered with queenly grace.

Looking at her in her sable robes, his reverent admiration mingled with another feeling as reverent, but more thrilling, as he recalled the splendid vision he had seen in disordered loveliness so short a time before.

- "What was it, John Kendrake," she asked, letting her small olive hand fall lightly on his arm, "that made the mystery of your last act?"
- "Lady," he said, "will you believe and trust me still, if I say I cannot answer you?"
 - "There is a secret, then?"
- "One that is sacred to the dead," he said, sadly, "and it is so linked with my destined course that it would seem to war against the oath I swore. Yet there is a way as sure and deadly, though I may not strike."
- "We touch a mystery at every step," said Leonora; "it is all incomprehensible to me—the man who came to-night. What purpose had he here?"

The keeper shook his head.

- "He came to steal, perhaps."
- "No; my jewel-case stood open near to hand, yet it is untouched. Conjecture is almost useless, so much in which the motive is inscrutable has been done. I think to-night's work, whatever may have been the result intended, is another link in the tragic chain."
 - "I think so, too; nay, I am sure of it. Yet it would

not be wise to attach any extraordinary importance to this event; some subtle plot is working in the dark against you, and in the dark we must work to meet it."

"I am weary," Leonora said, dropping her brow into her hands; "I cannot concentrate my thoughts upon the past or look into the future till I have had rest; yet there is a vague shape in the shadowy fancies that have come to me of late."

"What is the shape, dear madam?"

"Danger to me and all that are dear to me; and, indeed, I have cause to fear, since in my husband's house, and in spite of faithful guardians, even the sanctity of my chamber is not safe. The man—Chevalier de Buradoc, as I think—did not come for plunder."

The keeper reflected deeply. Strong as were his own suspicions, and directly as they pointed at Michael Ewrick, whose identity he could no longer doubt, he was entirely at a loss to ascribe a motive for the midnight visit.

A thought came like a flash of light.

"The child-it was to steal the child!"

The deed, though incredible in its hardihood, was not beyond conception or achievement by Michael Ewrick.

Kendrake did not mention the idea to Leonora; the danger once hinted of would have kept her heart on an incessant rack; but he mentally determined that little Alice should never for a moment henceforth be left unguarded.

"We shall know more should they capture him," he said, "and if they do not, we must be more watchful."

Leonora signed as she rose to retire.

"Do not," she said, solemnly, "forget your oath to him—your foster-brother."

"Never! My oath to him for you, and the oath to you for him, will never be forgotten. Do not doubt me, madam, because I have a secret—you shall know it soon; that, and all else that I suspect or think."

The lady gave him her hand-he bent his lips to it. Her

faith in him, not shaken, but touched by a momentary doubt, was quite restored.

"But for my promise to poor Loo," the keeper soliloquized, when he was alone, "the lady of Charnett would not have that terrible foe living. The struggle with my oath was hard when I had him at my gun. He could not have escaped, and so there would have been an end to his career of crime."

The boy divided Kendrake's care with Leonora and Lord Sydney's daughter. The keeper did his duty faithfully to his sister's son. Himself untaught, save for the instruction given to him by his foster-brother in their younger days, he knew enough to teach him the value of education.

He spent much of his time in self-culture and in tutoring Ishmael, who was a willing, and bid fair to be a brilliant, scholar. With him study was a passion—a greed, and he mastered the rudiments of knowledge with marvelous rapidity.

Even in this time of the great trouble, with which he was old enough to sympathize, the boy kept to his books with tireless assiduity. The splendid library at Charnett, generously placed at his disposal by Leonora, was like a mine of wealth to him. Young as he was, his brain could grasp the sense of such rich classic and historic lore as were to be found on the well-stored shelves. He promised to be a gifted linguist, and to all his fine capacities was added one most invaluable acquisition—a retentive memory.

Though his home from infancy had been the keeper's lodge, he felt quite at ease in Charnett's stately house, and trod the carpeted floors with an inborn grace whose semblance can never be acquired. The secret of his parentage was unknown. It was thought that Loo Kendrake had been deceived by some one almost of her own class. No suspicion went near the truth. Kendrake kept that hidden carefully.

As the days wore on, and Leonora met the lad sometimes, she began by degrees to take an interest in him. With little Alice he was already on terms of childish familiarity; there was

much chivalry in his brave, frank disposition, and he pitied with more than a boy's thoughtful gravity the fair, fragile orphan.

The lady of Charnett did not object to their intimacy; she recognized his innate superiority by intuition, and Alice wanted a playmate. Ishmael's society was sunshine to her amid the wintry desolation of her home.

And it was pleasant to see how he suited the inclinations of his more sober boyhood to her infantile fancies; he would even sacrifice willingly for her what he valued dearly—his hours of study.

This Leonora saw, and naturally pleased at his early devotion to her child, she took a greater interest in him. She liked him better perhaps for the pride that kept him from the servants; they treated him with unconscious respect, and invariably addressed him as Master Ishmael.

That he was fatherless, she divined by the fact that the forest-keeper was his sole guardian. About his parentage she did not inquire, inferring that his parents were dead.

Alice would insist upon his being her companion whenever she walked or rode out; and she grew attached to him, as children do to those who love them. Ishmael could ride well. James Bingham, with whom he was a special favorite, had taught him horsemanship; but though he might have ridden a horse from the stable, he was content to walk by the orphan's side and lead her along by the bridle.

Sometimes he took with him a small fowling-piece, a present from John Kendrake. And the lad could use it. Strangely enough, considering the nature of his outdoor education, he rather chose to fire at a target than to try his skill upon leveret or partridge; he would kill a kite or a hawk, because they were things of prey; anything else he would not hurt.

On this night, when Michael Ewrick had to seek refuge in the darkness from his pursuers, the boy came with the rest to see what was the matter. Kept back by the alarmed throng who crowded the ante-room and hidden by their greater height, he listened unobserved to the keeper's instructions.

Comprehending what had taken place, that a daring miscreant had with some evil purpose entered Leonora's chamber, Ishmael was the first to go in search of him; he did not hesitate or think of danger. He dressed rapidly, loaded his fowling-piece, and started off alone.

The gallant lad's blood tingled with excitement. He had caught the spirit of heroism from the stories he had read, and he longed with ardent desire to follow the midnight intruder and bring him to bay. The innocent rashness of the dauntless thought was sublime.

Light of foot, and well acquainted with the ground he trod, Ishmael sped onward at a pace that far outstripped the others. He tried to strike directly on the track. Ewrick, not fearing immediate pursuit, was striding on somewhat swiftly, but not like a fugitive, about thirty yards in advance of him.

Michael had replaced his mask and beard.

He was thinking of the keeper. The act he had done in removing beard and mask was intended to startle Kendrake for the moment, and so make him miss his deadly aim, but its effect astonished him. That by suddenly revealing his features he should unnerve the keeper momentarily he was quite prepared for; his own life depended on the possibility, but not that the other should drop his weapon.

Too well acquainted with Kendrake's character to attribute such a thing to mere surprise, he could only wonder as to its probable cause, and wondering so, he went back to the past—to the poor girl betrayed and dead.

Whether her child died with her or lived still, he did not know.

He was thinking that the keeper had hesitated perhaps to slay one whom his sister had loved, when he heard a light footstep behind him, and a fearless voice said:

[&]quot;Stop! robber! wretch!"

Michael grasped a pistol instinctively, and turned.

There, before him, stood the noble lad, with the fowlingpiece leveled at him straight, the young face full of resolution.

A secret instinct stayed the ruthless hand whose first impulse was to shoot the boy down like a rabbit. A shadow of the past was upon him—he had seen a face like Ishmael's before.

"Well, my lad," he said with a laugh, "what do you want?"
"Come back with me or I will fire. You are the robber.
The man with the mask."

Michael turned upon his heel, and strode on as before—the boy's courage amused him.

He had not gone far when he became struck with the evident truth that to disregard his young pursuer entirely would be dangerous. The same determined voice warned him.

"Go back, boy," he said, turning, sternly, "never trifle with a danger twice."

"You shall come back with me!"

"No mongrel that," thought Michael, noting the fearless attitude and dauntless eye; "it would be a pity to hurt him, but time is precious. I must frighten him."

With this intent he displayed a pistol.

"Go back," he said; "keep your gun for sparrows. Your hand is not yet trained to bring an eagle down."

Ishmael did not flinch, though the pistol covered him.

"I always shoot a hawk," he said, sighting for a deliberate shot, "and so I could an eagle if it threatened me."

With the last word he fired right at Ewrick's breast.

Though he fired point blank, at less than twenty yards, the light charge of his fowling-piece must have scattered harmlessly, for Michael stood unhurt. He recoiled as though totally astounded at the childish fellow's courage.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The answer came with Spartan brevity.

"I am Ishmael."

"Well, Ishmael," Michael said, with a smile, half savage,

half admiring, "were you not so brave a lad, and so like one I would not harm, I should kill you, for I never spare those who cross my path."

Again he turned, leaving Ishmael, who had clenched the barrel of his weapon in both hands to fight with if necessary, standing bewildered to see him go untouched.

"The charge must have dropped out," he thought. "I could not have missed him at the distance."

At this moment he heard voices calling out and hurried footsteps coming toward him. The stud-groom and his companions had heard the report and rushed to see who had fired.

James Bingham found the boy still staring blankly in the direction taken by the masked man.

"He stood fast by that fallen branch," Ishmael said, "when I shot at him, and he went away unhurt. Look—there he goes."

Looking at the point indicated, they saw a tall figure pass across a line of sward defined by the clear moonlight. He wore no mask, but to Ishmael his gait and flowing beard were like the stranger.

A chill fell upon the men. Instead of going to capture him they stood motionless, for the cloaked figure advanced directly toward them; not as if to meet or accost them, but as if he did not see them.

Silent, stately, slow, with folded arms and lowered head, he strode. The men drew back awe-stricken. Bingham was the only one who retained anything like nerve, and his heart quaked with an icy shiver.

He saw a pallid face, whose noble lineaments were those that characterized a race not to be mistaken. One of the family portraits, stripped from its massive frame in the old gallery, could not have been more like a lord of Charnett.

On went the figure—silent, slow, and stately—until within sight of the house, and then it raised its right arm to the sky. It might have been to breathe a blessing or invoke a curse. The

lordly head, crowned with long, clustering hair, was upraised in prayer or adjuration.

Some few moments he stood thus. To the startled watchers it seemed an age; and then the right arm, sinking to the breast, was folded with the other. He came back, retracing step by step the line he had taken.

Past the stricken group he went just as Stephen Lester came up from another direction. He caught sight of the silent figure's face, and his own cheek went gray with a deadly pallor.

He leaped back like a dying man cleft to the life-core with a dagger, and, throwing up his arms so that his hands were clasped above his head, fell backward with an awful shriek, jabbering in terror:

"Mercy!" he said; "mercy for me! The colonel made me do it—the colonel——"

The conscience that smote his guilty soul at sight of the strange figure deprived him of all sense, and left him inert and helpless, with superstitious, sick, and hopeless dread.

To Bingham and the rest his words and conduct were a mystery, like the stranger who had vanished as in a dream.

So deep was the feeling that had taken possession of their faculties that it was a relief to hear the dense silence broken by a voice.

It was Ishmael's.

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The boy had remained with the others, motionless and silent, but he was mute with a dim sense that was rather of wonderment than fear. He watched curiously till the sable form was lost in the shadows of the gloomy heath.

Then, clutching the stud-groom by the hand, he said:

"How like he was to the picture of Lord Cecil, only older—much older."

James Bingham drew a deep breath and glanced at one of his fellows, Abel Jarvis, the old coachman, who had been in the service from boyhood, and had grown gray in it.

"Master Ishmael is right," Abel said, shaking his head sagely;

"he be very much like Lord Cecil. It's sad times for Charnett—sad times. Things be mortal wrong, and no good's to happen when the dead cannot rest in their graves."

The steward, who had by this time somewhat recovered under the influence of such rough restoratives as could be administered on the emergency, was now raised to his feet. His strong frame shook in every fiber. He was totally nerveless.

"What did I say?" he asked, with a sickly effort to force a smile at his own terror. "I am not what I used to be, but I thought I saw——"

He paused, and added, abruptly:

"I meant nothing."

"Then you took a peculiar way of expressing it, said the studgroom, dryly. "One would think that you knew more than was good for your peace of mind. However, let's go back now. We must give up the search for to-night."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FOOT-BRIDGE ON THE MARSH.

The forest-keeper had anticipated that the hunt after Michael Ewrick would have some such result as he heard from Bingham. He only smiled bitterly, and said to himself:

"It is fate; the career of that midnight prowler is not yet destined to end."

The next part of the stud-groom's story—that referring to the sable, solitary form which had come like a spirit before them—interested him deeply. He was thoroughly versed in the Charnett history, and knew its darkness in the past. He made no remark concerning Stephen Lester's conduct—it did not seem so strange to him as to the others.

"It is not the first time that figure has appeared," he said to

the groom. "I have seen it in the forest more than once, though it never came so close to me as it came to you."

"I never heard you mention it," said Bingham, in surprise.

"I am not habitually talkative," observed the keeper, smiling gravely, "and I had no wish to spread a rumor that had gone far enough. It was like Lord Cecil, you say?"

"In every feature. It was just the face he would have had if he had lived."

"That is difficult to judge. Lord Cecil died in early manhood. It is said that he exactly resembled Lord Reginald."

"So did this figure," said Bingham, emphatically. "The same style of expression—the same kind of beard."

"What age did he look, think you?"

"That's hard to say. The Charnetts do not alter much after the years of manhood. Forty, perhaps, at a guess, or more."

"You must have observed him closely," said the keeper, hiding under the remark a thought which had often dwelt upon his mind before, and which was now turned toward conviction.

"I could not help it," said Bingham, who keenly felt the outrage done by the masked man's audacious intrusion. "I would give a little to find him."

"You had better give the requisite information to the local authorities, and let them do their best to find him. Her ladyship will be satisfied that you have done your best."

As the stud-groom was about to retire, the keeper said:

"Will you send Ishmael to me?"

"I will. He behaved nobly, and dared more than most men would have dared, for he faced the masked man singly."

"I did not know he went alone," said Kendrake, startled. "Is he safe?"

"Quite; though it is a wonder he escaped. He was in advance of us; we did not know he was out; but it appears that he caught sight of the robber and shot at him."

A gleam of savage pleasure flashed from the keeper's eye.
"Strangely enough, though he fired point-blank—and he

does not aim badly—the charge had no effect; he thought it had dropped out, perhaps, but that could not be, for Abel Jarvis picked up the wadding scorched and broken."

- "Then there was no hurt inflicted?"
- "None."
- "Better so, better so," mused Kendrake.
- "Let me see him," he said aloud; and when the groom was gone, he paced the chamber to and fro.
- "The old prophecy," he muttered, "the old prophecy—son against sire, sire against son."

Ishmael entered, and Kendrake drew the boy to his side.

- "Tell me," he said, kissing the broad, white brow, "why you went out to-night without saying anything to me?"
- "I thought you would not let me go," said Ishmael, promptly, but in deprecation of his guardian's reproving tone; "and I feared he would escape while the men were preparing to follow him."
 - "But he did escape, after all."
- "That was not my fault. I fired at him, but the charge scattered, or dropped out, I suppose. I wish it had been a bullet, instead of shot."
- "Hush! It is not good to think of hurting a fellow-creature. Do you not remember that it says so in the Good Book?"
- "Sinful people ought to die—it says that in the Good Book, too. 'The wages of sin is death,'" replied Ishmael.

Kendrake silenced him with a quieting, caressive gesture.

- "That great, stern truth requires the interpretation of wiser heads than ours," he said; "besides, in this case, it would have been very sad had you hurt him."
 - "Why?"
 - "You shall have the reason in good time."
- "But I heard you tell the men to bring him back, alive or dead. And why, if they were to shoot him, should not I?"
 - "Hush, boy! you ask questions that I cannot answer. Tell

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me this—did I ever advise you in anything that was not for your good?"

"Never!"

"Or bid you obey me without questioning, unless I had a proper motive, such as you have proved afterward?"

"Never!"

"Well, then, remember what I say now, and obey me sacredly. If you were to meet again the man you fired at to-night, would you recognize him?"

"Anywhere."

"Did you see his face?"

"No; he wore a mask; but I should know his voice—I should know him by his figure and his eyes as well as I should know you."

"But if he were disguised?"

No question or argument could shake the tenacity with which Ishmael clung to the belief. He was positive.

"Then," said John Kendrake, "if ever you do meet him, no matter where or in what circumstances, unless your own life is in peril at his hand, never speak to him or touch him in anger. Never utter a word that might put him in danger."

"What a strange thing to say."

"I may have to say things yet more strange. But promise me."

"I will remember and obey-you know I will."

"Surely, if I ask it and say it is for your own sake, for your mother's sake. She would ask it, were she living."

Ishmael needed no stronger injunction. The recollection, the name of his parent, made him all tenderness in an instant.

"I will never forget," he said, lowly. "But should my own life be in peril at his hand?"

The keeper's voice groaned with emotion as he said:

"Say this, 'the secret shall die with me, and the sacrifice be mine.'"

"The secret shall die with me, and the sacrifice be mine," re-

peated Ishmael, slowly, to impress the words upon his memory. "You will tell me what it means some day?" he added, wistfully.

"Some day, should there be occasion. Remember, Ishmael, were it a case of life and death between you, and if he had a knife at your throat, he would not strike if you said that. Now go to your room; do not forget, but do not be troubled."

The keeper kissed his sister's child again, and the boy bade him an affectionate good-night. He went inperfect faith, though wondering much.

Ishmael went to his room; the keeper listened to his footstep with a mournful smile.

"The tiger-cub who has licked blood is never safe," he said,
"and Ishmael has more of his sire's tigerish instinct than I shall
be able to master always. Were they to meet as strangers and
in enmity, they would be fearful foes."

He rose, and from the quiet casement looked over the landscape and wide heath that stretched away before him dim and vast in the great hush of coming dawn.

"I must take counsel with O'Neil," he said, in soliloquy; "for events crowd rapidly upon each other, and with every day of Michael Ewrick's stay there is jeopardy to little Alice and Leonora. The child must not go out with Ishmael again—Bingham shall accompany them; to lose her would be a final blow indeed.

"I would denounce him," he went on, thinking of Michael; "but subtle as he is, and leagued with Reuben Uxley, he would deny and could disprove his own identity. We must wait—wait until the proofs of crime coil round him and bring him shackled to his doom. O'Neil will help me; I can trust him, I feel it in my soul."

He felt calmer after having formed the resolution to see Chicto's detective—the young Irishman. They had not met during the last few days, but Kendrake felt sure of finding him at the Falcon's Nest.

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Calmer, too, he felt for the thought that James Bingham should escort the little heiress of Charnett in her future rides with Ishmael; they generally had an attendant, but he was rather stupid than simple.

The stud-groom accepted the new duty willingly. Kendrake had but to hint that he was needed rather as a protector than as an attendant, and Bingham felt he had a post of confidence.

"I have said nothing to her ladyship concerning my suspicion," the keeper said to him; "it would make her anxious, keep her in continual suspense; but I am certain that the man who came last night meant mischief to the child."

Bingham weighed the heavy, silver-mounted butt of a strong, flexible whip in his hand.

"I brought an ox down with a single blow from that," he said, "and if any ruffian tries to harm our lady's child while she is in my care, a similar touch would try the strength of his head."

"It would brain him."

"That would be his lookout," said Bingham, coolly; "I should do my duty."

Kendrake was satisfied; he had found a man who understood what was required of him.

Ishmael was deeply absorbed in his favorite Roman history when, late that afternoon, Leonora's fairy child stole into the library to summon him away. Her sweet, wistful face banished whatever feeling of regret he felt at having to close his book.

The stud-groom brought her pony to the front. Salib, the pony, was a beautiful creature, purely white, and graceful as a deer. Bingham made it a point of pride to keep its silky hide and mane in faultless condition.

Ishmael led his companion down. Leonora came to the hall.

"Take care of her," the lady said to Ishmael, as he, with

itural gallantry, helped Alice to her seat; "and do not stay it long—not more than an hour."

The boy bowed low in response.

"Return before sunset," Leonora added; "and do not leave our attendant."

The stud-groom touched his hat, as if to answer for them."

"Is it you, Bingham?" Leonora said. "I thought the boy eters went usually?"

"Yes, my lady, but he is too young. Mr. Kendrake advised to take care of her in future."

"Quite right, and thanks for the attention. Good-by, urling."

Descending the broad stone steps to caress her child, Leonora ood and watched while they went slowly down the avenue, ith Ishmael at Salib's bridle, and Bingham, mounted on a pwerful roadster, riding not far behind.

Half the hour had expired when Alice and her companions ached the marsh, so called by custom, though it was now a ece of fertile ground, its marshy qualities having disappeared fore the effects of cultivation; it formed the western boundary the estate, which it divided from the heath.

Through its center ran a rapid stream, spanned by a wooden idge, a mere footway, roughly constructed, and only intended r the use of such keepers as might have to watch the forest ime. Alice had never seen it before, and at first sight was ized with a childish desire to cross into the forest."

"We had better not," suggested Ishmael; "it is almost time return."

"But I should like to," said the little lady, "and I will."

"It is not safe, Alice—is it, Mr. Bingham?"

"Scarcely, Master Ishmael."

"Salib will step so carefully—see, and there are such pretty owers by the trees; I want to gather some."

Wishing to please his fair charge, the boy led Salib over, the ony stepping with sagacious care, as if it knew the frail nature

of the passage. The stud-groom would not trust the heavier weight of himself and horse upon it, but leaped the stream like a steeple-chaser.

Alice dismounted, and picked a heap of wild flowers, prattling to Ishmael the while. He, to amuse her, set some tufts of turf upon the bridge-rail, and fired at them with his gun.

"I have hit ten out of twelve shots," he said to Bingham.

"That is very good, Master Ishmael. You must have hit eleven, for there is only one left out of twelve."

"One fell into the water. I should like to hit the other, but I have no more shot."

Sympathizing with the keen desire of a young sportsman to strike a sole remaining mark, Bingham twisted a round zinc button from his gaiter.

"Try this," he said, giving it to Ishmael.

The boy loaded his gun, went to the bridge, adjusted the tuft, took fifty of his longest steps toward the forest, turned, and raised his weapon.

"How far is that?" he asked.

"About thirty yards, as near as may be-a good distance."

Alice, interested in Ishmael's success, went close to Bingham, and looked on.

Ishmael ran his eye along the barrel, had the mark sighted, and was about to pull the trigger, when an interruption came—a stranger, mounted on a powerful black steed, rode up quietly, and reined in by Bingham's side.

"Is that Charnett House?" he inquired, pointing with a handsome whip to the edifice.

The voice made Ishmael start. He looked at Bingham's interrogator, and seemed to feel a vague sense of recollection. He lowered his gun, holding it with his left hand on the barrel, his right upon the lock.

"It is," said Bingham, respectfully.

A sinister smile swept over the stranger's lip. He slid his hand down his whip, and held it by the thong near the lash.

"Go back to it," he said, "and startle the good people with this story."

Before the groom had time to think or act, a sudden savage blow sent him stunned and bleeding to the ground. A hoarse, gasping moan told that the stroke had done its work.

Little Alice gave a thrilling cry. The stranger seized and swung her to the saddle before him, and, throwing a fold of his cloak over her head, spurred rapidly away.

So swiftly was it done—the savage hurt inflicted on Bingham and the child's abduction—that Ishmael was for the moment paralyzed. He heard another cry from Alice—saw the wreath she had just twined scattered and broken by the feet of the stranger's horse, and then quick as lightning he sprang into action. His gun, loaded this time with a deadly charge, was leveled right at the stranger's head, and with a sharp flash and a ringing report the solid round zinc button went on its mission.

Not without effect—the stranger reeled, swerved in the saddle, and had to catch the pommel to keep himself from falling. His swarthy face, tinged black with rage, was turned back to the boy, and Ishmael saw blood running.

Young as he was the sight roused the more savage instincts inherited from his sire, and the boy gave a cry.

"Alice!" he said. "I shall save her yet!"

The stranger had not fallen; he reeled, then recovered himself, and his powerful steed widened the distance rapidly between him and his daring pursuer.

"The lad aims well," he muttered, between his teeth; "another shot like that, and this life of mine would give no more trouble to my foes."

The boy's desperate cry reached him again.

"Alice! Alice! Give me Alice!"

Wiping the warm blood from his face, the stranger laughed, and turned to look at Ishmael. The laugh, the look betrayed him—he was recognized.

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"I know you!" shouted Ishmael. "The man in the mask!"

And, leaping to the senseless groom, he wrenched another round zinc button from his gaiter, ran for Bingham's horse, and sprang into the saddle.

"Alice!" he cried again. "I will save her if I die!"

Lashing the horse into a maddened pace, the lad loaded his gun as he rode, and went hotly in pursuit. He had recognized the stranger, but he had forgotten John Kendrake's warning.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LAIR OF THE TIGER.

It was certainly a race for life. That terrible ride, when the boy with childhood's bloom yet on his face, and with a deadly purpose in his heart, followed the father whom he did not know.

Michael was a splendid horseman. He had trained in a wild school, and so a ride at sunset through Charnett's gloomy heath was not much to him, though he did not know the way too well. He cleared each barrier like a hunter; wide ditch and treacherous hedge, the black horse obeyed his hand by instinct.

But Ishmael was a splended rider too, and knew every yard of the ground he traversed. Bingham had taught him how to keep his seat, and how to ride flat country, or take a five-barred gate.

He was not very far behind the abductor of Leonora's child, and the distance lessened with each stride; while the boy's keen eye watched to see how soon he would be fairly within gunshot. He felt no fear, and was blind to danger; his whole thought was to save his little playmate.

Not to return without Alice he was resolved, and so in the other's track he thundered on with his gun ready. The stranger made for the center of the forest.

At any other time Michael would have laughed his childish foe to scorn, or paused to strike him down without a gleam of pity, but at the present he was conscious of his peril. The boy was evidently a good marksman, and he had another bullet in his weapon.

Almost in the forest center, and not far from the ruined hut, was a piece of ground inclosed with high, rudely-constructed hurdles—it had been a pasturage.

The inclosure covered a large space. The hurdles were a dangerous hight, and Ewrick had the alternative to ride round or venture the leap. He chose the latter.

"He will surely not try this," he thought, keeping his heels close, and giving his horse a low, caressive cry. "'Sdeath!"

His willing animal went over like a stag and alighted safely. The utterance of the word that broke from Ewrick was caused by the sight of Ishmael, who went at the hurdle fearlessly.

It was cleared; no misadventure overtook the daring lad, whose set teeth and flashing eye showed his determination to follow to the death. It was taken; and Michael, feeling that his steed, with the extra weight it had to carry, was not equal to the second hurdle, made a circuit for a gap.

That was Ishmael's chance. Not more than twenty yards divided them, for he rode straight, and leveling his gun, called out:

"Give me Alice or I fire."

Michael laughed in fierce admiration at the limning out of the likeness to his own indomitable spirit.

"Fire!" he said; "I am invulnerable."

Michael wore a finely-tempered suit of flexible mail, light and strong as wondrous skill in mechanism could make it. Therefore he was safe from foot to neck, or the charge from Ishmael's gun on the night of Michael's entry into Leonora's chamber would have done its work.

"In the body," said the boy, "but not in the head."

And he pulled the trigger; the round zinc button went danger-

ously near; it was not two inches out of line, and but for those two inches it would have been buried in that subtle brain which had prompted such mischief in Charnett.

"Close," muttered Michael; "some of Kendrake's skill and hatred came with that aim. But the chase is over."

He uttered the cry of a cuckoo as he came within view of the ruined hut. Simon McDonald appeared, gun in hand, and leading out a horse.

"Stop that young tiger who is coming," Michael said; "bring him down."

"I had better kill him," said Simon, coolly, "or he will know us again."

"Sdeath! hurt not a hair. Such rare metal is not plentiful in the world. Fire at the brute he rides."

The word saved Ishmael's life. The charge intended first for him entered the head of his horse, and its sharp shriek of agony was human as it fell.

The boy, stunned by the shock, had not time to free his foot from the stirrup. The dead animal rolled partly on him.

"If you have hit the lad," said Michael, fiercely, "it may be the worse for you. But there is not a moment to lose. Take the child and away. At the King's Arms Hotel in Drocburn you will find a traveling carriage in waiting for Count Dunault and his daughter. Make for London by a devious track. Look your last upon England's shore to-morrow. And, remember, discovery is death to you, or worse than death—the hulks."

Michael produced a pocket-book.

"I shall not forget."

"Here is the money, with your instructions, use it carefully and obey me to the letter. Teach the child to forget her identity, if possible. Be on the alert for those who may come after you. Beware of Chicto. Beware of Robert O'Neil. We shall meet in Paris."

"In Paris?"

[&]quot;Assume a French title, the right to it is there-Count Du-

nault, who disappeared some years ago; he has no family, and his friends have forgotten him. His private letters and certificate of nobility are in the pocket-book. I have forgotten nothing."

"Heavens! what a thought. How came you by those letters?"

"'Sdeath! What matters that to you? He will not come to claim them. Go, and remember."

McDonald shuddered as he mounted the animal he had led out, and rode away. The man whose name and title he was to assume had never been seen since one night many years ago, when he quarreled in a gambling room with the Chevalier de Buradoc.

Michael stood by the side of his black charger, and watched the poacher till the darkness hid him. The sinister beauty of his face, at work with the worst and most powerful passions, was an awful picture as he said, in low soliloquy:

"Another barrier gone, and so the end draws near. That poor fragile thing is gone, as safely as if dead, from my inheritance and me. And, Leonora! I recollect with burning heart and burning brain, her maddening beauty when she lay before me sleeping, To see so much again were worth more risk if 'twere not such madness—madness."

He turned and went to Ishmael. Strange that he who never spared an enemy should glance with something akin to pity on the fragile boy.

"I never spared a foe before," he thought, exerting his vast strength to lift the huge body that was crushing Ishmael's legs. "But though the lad has set his mark on me, I could not injure him. I owe Kendrake a little mercy; he had me at his gun, and might have slain me, so let him have his urchin back unhurt."

"Only stunned," he added, having felt Ishmael's breast. "I am glad of that. I can leave him now; he will soon revive."

Leaving him to recover, Michael rode into the village, and was soon face to face with Uxley, in the lawyer's study.

Reuben was anxious to know how his accomplice had succeeded, but with usual caution he curbed his curiosity.

- "Who gave you that mark?" he asked.
- "Kendrake's cub. There is little of the peasant mongrel breed in him."
 - "Does he live?"
- "Live? Ay! Perhaps to do more mischief yet. Not that I grow merciful, but I would not hurt the urchin for being too brave; besides, Kendrake did not shoot me when he might have done so, and not to kill the boy was fair requital."
- "It is quite as well the urchin exists. At worst, yours should not be the hand to harm him,"
 - "Why?"
- "Only for the reason you have given. The Kendrakes have suffered enough already."
- "True. We make progress, Reuben. Another barrier is gone, and for the next step the chevalier will rid Charnett of his presence soon."
 - "The child?"
- "Is far from home by this time, and on to-morrow night will be out of England."

He told Uxley the details of the abduction, and the lawyer heard him to the end without interruption.

- "Were you safe from recognition?" he asked.
- "Quite. Though the boy said he should know me again. But his word would be nothing."
 - "A clew to those who are on the track."
- "Nothing on which they could take action. We must have those documents, Uxley—the deeds of my bartered birthright—and the claim put in by the Chevalier de Buradoc on behalf of Michael Ewrick will meet with no opposition."

The lawyer shook his head at that.

"They are troublesome people to come in contact with," he said. "I would rather have to deal with any other London firm. They have a professional antipathy against me."

"Messrs Pentland & Snell?"

"Yes. We differed once on a point connected with the Charnett estate. It still remains in abeyance, and I have, perhaps, the best of the question, but they think there was a little sharp practice on my part."

Michael laughed at the other's gravely injured tone.

"They will see some sharper practice yet," he said; "and the train is too well laid to explode before its time. The will—the one that would have restored the disinherited—had he lived—is here, and Leonora carries in her breast the one that tells my right. That was a narrow chance. Had not the forest-keeper dropped his gun, I should not be here now."

"I have felt anxious on one point," Uxley said. "What would you have done had you been captured?"

"I should have said I went there to keep an assignation," replied Michael Ewrick, quietly, "and the lady's reputation would have suffered."

The lawyer drew a heavy breath, and coiled a piece of red tape round his finger. He was thinking what a position Michael might have taken had he applied his quick and subtle intellect to the legal world.

"You must keep close," he said, "for there will be vigilant search to night, and any stranger on whom suspicion may fall will be arrested without much questioning."

"On the contrary, I shall make it a point to show myself in the village to-morrow, perhaps call at the house and sympathize with the bereaved. A danger boldly met is not a danger. I can defy recognition and suspicion."

"Not suspicion. We are very keenly watched, Michael. That quiet stranger, he who sent the telegram to Monsieur Gustave Chickto, will not leave us alone long."

"I fear him, too," said Ewrick, grimly, "with his infernal quietude, and his sleepless hatred. While he lives I shall not be safe; were he dead I should hardly feel secure. Were I acknowledged Charneti's master, with my foot upon its thresh-

old, I should have a sense of dread that the Sin Phantom would appear to dash me back into despair."

"He could not rise from the grave."

"Sdeath! he ros from the Seine—escaped a double fate, for the hand that put the stiletto through his throat was not one to fail. I have a presentiment sometimes that the man will not die until he has sent me to my doom."

"We must cure that presentiment," said Uxley, looking reflectively at the carpet which covered the old well. "He is coming here to-night."

"To-night?"

"To learn a little local history," added the lawyer, with peculiarly distinct and spiteful articulation, "from the oldest inhabitant. It is a study in which Mr. O'Neil takes deep interest, and too much study is aptato kill people."

"If he come to-night," said Michael, with a flash of savage anticipation, "we can end misgiving."

Just then there came a ring at the bell.

Uxley's ancient serving woman having been to answer it, returned with a card bearing the well-known, dreaded name—"Mr. Robert O'Neil."

"In there," said Uxley, rapidly; and Michal glided swiftly into a room behind the study. "Be on the alert."

He had scarcely time to close the door and resume his seat before O'Neil entered. Uxley was sitting quietly at the table then.

"I have not forgotten your promise, you see," said the young Irishman, throwing himself with careless familiarity into the chair which Michael had just vacated; "and may I preface our conversation with an apology for a jest—an error?"

The lawyer looked an inquiry. Though he prided himself upon his power to read in the face the thought at work in the brain, he could not determine whether the light sparkling in O'Neil's brilliant eye was of harmless irony or menace.

"I mistook you for the oldest inhabitant," O'Neil went on, "and I only discovered my error recently."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. It seems that the individual who can justly lay claim to that honorable distinction is an aged domestic in the service, of the Charnett family—the coachman, Abel Jarvis."

The sparkling eye meant mischief then. Uxley was on his guard. The cool, careless gentleman who sat facing him was a stealthy and a bitter foe, who took his measures well. He had not cultivated Abel's acquaintance or mentioned his name without a purpose.

"Charnett is a quaint old place," said the Irishman, "and to any one who, like myself, is fond of local history, it is full of curious and interesting information. I have gleaned many instructive items lately."

"Will you take some wine?" asked Uxley, rising.

"Thank you, no. I am a very sober individual, and rarely indulge; at this hour, never. I have one vice, I smoke—may I indulge?"

"Certainly. Make yourself entirely at home."

"Thanks. It is a disinfectant, and the atmosphere—pardon me—is musty. We are to exchange information—who shall begin?"

O'Neil shifted his position so as to face Uxley, and have the dim antique lamp-light equally between them. Then he produced a handsome cigar-case, extracted a weed, and made an unsuccessful attempt to kindle one of the old-fashioned brownpaper fuzes.

"Damp," he said, flinging it into the fire-place, "and I have not another."

"Let me get you a light," said Uxley.

He went into the room where Michael was and took a coil of red wax taper from a shelf. The chamber was in darkness, but he caught the dusky glance of Ewrick.

"Listen," Uxley whispered, "and when you hear me say, 'it is time,' come to help me."

Waiting for no reply, he went back and lighted the taper, which he set before O'Neil. Then he set the lamp shade down to leave his own face in shadow.

- "My general information is not extensive," he said, "but I may recall some trifles of interest while I listen to you."
- "Very well. You are naturally desirous to hear what I know about the recent tragedy."
 - "I shall be grateful for the slightest atom of intelligence."
- "I have discoverd much and guessed at more," said Robert O'Neil. "Perhaps the latter term is misapplied, for on the actual facts I have based a hypothesis put together by induction. As a legal gentleman, you understand the process."
- "Perfectly. The art of analysis directed upon probable motive. It is very often at fault, being but a theory after all; but it frequently goes near the truth."
- "Frequently. And I go very near the truth I think, though my theory may seem startling, for it implicates you."

Uxley did not change countenance visibly. The muscles of his face grew inflexible and hard by imperceptible degrees. The savage intent in his soul was growing stronger.

"We start from a given point—the murder," said O'Neil, and his glance, penetrating the shadow Uxley had thrown between them, seemed to search the lawyer through and through. "Lord Sydney was generally loved in the village; he had been absent many years, and his return was hardly known at his father's house when the deed was done."

"True."

"By what, up to this time, I believed to be a curious coincidence only and not premeditation, Lord Sydney, with his wife and child, had traveled from the Continent to London in the same train, from London to Lockstone in the same train, and from Lockstone to Charnett's lodge-gate in the same coach with

a stranger—a Frenchman, he who at the inquest called himself the Chevalier de Buradoc."

"A gentleman of high position and irreproachable character. He is above suspicion."

"Wait. He is avowedly an intimate friend of one who, in the event of there being no other claimant, might put himself forward as heir. I allude to Michael Ewrick."

The lawyer's foot felt stealthily about the carpet till it rested on the hidden spring that opened the old well-trap.

"The idea may seem absurd," O'Neil continued, "but follow me to the end of my theory. It would meet attention if I were to offer it to a London solicitor—to—say Messrs. Pentland & Snell."

"Why to them?" asked Uxley, and the hard face set more rigidly into inflexibility.

"They were Lord Sydney's solicitors, and are the Lady Leonora's. Now part in fact and part in theory I derive this: The Chevalier de Buradoc is so associated with Michael Ewrick that their interests are identical, and he is helped by some one in Charnett—a resident—a man interested in Michael's installation as master here."

"Dangerous that to suggest to me."

"You were the family solicitor," smiled O'Neil, "and should be glad to hear any suggestion likely to elucidate the mystery, and my induction comes closely home. Michael's birthright was sold by his father to Lord Robert, the late earl. You, Mr. Uxley, were known to have been actuated by feelings of more than legal devotion to hold Miss Agnes Brewer in grateful regard, and she was Michael's mother."

"Well?" said the lawyer, in a whisper.

"In the way of Michael's claim there stand these: Lord Sydney, his daughter Alice, a question of legitimacy, some documents relating to the sale or mortgage of the title and estate to Lord Robert, and the will made to reinstate Lord.

Sydney, whose disinheritance was morally annulled on his father's death-bed."

"Go on," said Uxley, huskily; the stealthy foot was playing on the spot above the fatal spring.

"Now, suppose that Michael, in the person of his friend the chevalier, comes here and finds a willing accomplice in you. Don't move from your chair, Mr. Uxley, but listen. He slays Lord Sydney and you shield his crime. He steals at night into Leonora's chamber, for what? The will—the will that gives Charnett to the child of the disinherited; and so between you two there is a compact to make the assassin rich and titled. It is the truth—murder will out. I have my foot upon the red track, and you, unless you confess all, shall share Michael's doom."

As each word threatening disgrace and peril of death rang in Uxley's ears, he rose, and, swaying for a moment, steadied himself, and clutched the massive silver lamp.

"I have followed him step by step," O'Neil said, fixing the lawyer with his kindling eye, "trod the dark way and tracked him to his lair. What think you of my inductive theory? Speak your choice. Give him to justice—help me to send him to the scaffold—or——"

"No!" thundered the lawyer. "You know too much Take the death you have sought. It is time!"

The heavy lamp, hurled savagely at O'Neil's head, crashed against the wall and was extinguished.

O'Neil held the taper high above his head and rose erect.

That instant the floor went from under him like lightnin but swift with the instinct of life he bounded back, and saw t black abyss at his feet.

His face had changed. The frank, genial expression we and left a look of deadly menace in its place.

He drew a revolver, leaped the chasm, and seizing Uxley by the throat, placed the muzzle at his head.

"Gray-haired devil I" he said, "why should I spare you?"

He did not hear the footfall of him who stole behind him like a shadow—he saw nothing; but the taper was dashed from his grasp, and a powerful hand closed upon his throat.

"It is time," said the chilling voice of Michael. "Ah, my friend, you hunt well, but you have come into a tiger's lair."

The taper had gone out.

Then, in the darkness of the lawyer's study, while the old man cowered down to shut the horror away, there was an appalling fight for lite.

The lawyer, crouching in his corner, heard the dull crash of fearful blows, and the splash of spurting blood.

Both combatants were men of vast physical power, each had the other by the throat, and each fought with a pistol butt. The deadly, wordless strife had an awful sound in the gloom.

It ceased—the tramp of feet, the short, quick gasp, the stifled cry of pain; and Uxley, creeping for the taper, which he kindled, saw a sight not easily to be forgotten.

The gallant young Irishman was down the trap, clinging to its edge.

His white face, smeared with blood, looked out of the abyss, and Michael, kneeling on the floor, smiling grimly, pitilessly, like a demon, had his iron grip on O'Neil's fair neck.

O'Neil asked no mercy. There was none in remorseless eye or on savage lip.

Michael's powerful arm, with the heavy bronze-stocked revolver in its hand, rose and descended twice. His victim's hold relaxed slowly.

"Assassin," whispered O'Neil, and pallid countenance and haunting gaze were fixed on his slayer to the last. "I am bu one of a terrible league. You are doomed. The Sin Phantom will track you even from the grave."

The whisper died away. The white face, smeared with blood, went down. The trap closed. And, in the solitude of crime, the pitiless miscreant and his gray-haired accomplice were alone with their victim and their secret.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEAUTIFUL EQUESTRIENNE.

The midland town of Drocburn was quiet in the hush of night when McDonald reined in his tired steed, and paused to reflect what course he should pursue; he knew that the child's abduction must soon be discovered, and then there would be a party on the track in eager search.

If captured, a double danger threatened him—Michael Ewrick's menace and the peril of the law. That he should avoid all possible suspicion was a stern necessity; but to be seen on horseback with Alice would be certain to excite wonder and inquiry.

The loneliness of a country road after dark favored his escape so far. The few people he met he passed so rapidly that it was impossible to discern the nature of his burden. The child had spoken once or twice during the wild ride, and he had answered kindly, but the strangeness of the situation subdued her faculties again, and she was senseless when within a mile of Drocburn he drew rein.

He had ridden thirty miles with her, and at a pace that broke his horse down when that distance was done. Only once had he been interrupted on the way, and he left his interrupter—a mounted patrol—in a deep ditch, with a bad wound on his forehead.

It was not wisely done. McDonald knew by dear experience how slight and delicately wrought are the threads that lead from the criminal to his sin. The man whom he had struck would not be likely to forget him should the seekers for the lost child come that way.

While he was pondering how to enter the town in an apparently ordinary way, the distant scream of a locomotive whistle suggested an expedient. A train was coming to the Drocburn Station.

"The horse I shall not want," he said, "it is of no further use and might betray me."

Dismounting, he placed Alice on the ground, loosened the saddle straps and bridle, and dealt the animal a smart lash with his riding whip; the creature, startled at finding itself riderless, and made restive by the loose saddle, careered away.

The poacher watched it out of sight. A white mile-stone gleaming by the wayside turned it from its course, and it struck across a range of meadow land.

"That will not be found near Drocburn or Charnett," he said, as he picked up the child and went toward the town.
"My worst difficulty will be with this poor little one. I wish she would wake; her face looks like death."

The man was bad, but not cruel.

"Poor, tender one," he thought, "it is hard to leave your mother at this early age, and my own part of the sin seems worse as I think of it; but had I refused to take you he might have found more evil hands."

Alice woke at this moment—her large eyes opening wide in wonder fell upon a countenance that was gentle at the time.

"Don't be afraid," he said, kindly, and anticipating her terror; "you are safe here."

"Where is mamma and Ishmael?—where is Ishmael?"

"Hush, pretty one! don't speak of them, or that bad man with the beard will hear us, and take you from me. You will see mamma soon if you are quiet."

He had touched the right chord. Her dread of the man with the beard was stronger than any other feeling, and she was silent, in the fear of being taken from one who, though a stranger, spoke softly and looked kind.

The trust of childhood is soon won—its faith in goodness is instinctive. Alice nestled to his shoulder as if sure of protection while with him.

"Will you take me back to mamma, and Ishmael, and Salib, please?"

There was a curious feeling in the poacher's throat as he tried to fashion his words and voice to harmonize with hers. The man who had been a hunted wretch, compelled to seek refuge from his fellows, and live in a state of barbaric solitude, felt that it was something to have won confidence, even from a child.

- "I will take you back to them," he said; and a thrill of real emotion ran through him as he pressed the fragile, clinging form more closely to his breast. "But we must hide away till the bad man is gone, You are not afraid of me?"
- "Oh, no. You are kind, and speak like John Kendrake; and he is very fond of me."
- "So am I, pretty one," he said, with a caress. "I took you from the man who struck poor Bingham; he shall not hurt you."
 - "Mamma will be so glad, and Ishmael."
- "And Mr. Kendrake, too," he said, following the current of her thought.
- "Yes; and Salib, and Mary Naylor, and everybody; and you will stay with us—will you?"
- "Perhaps. But will you try and remember this?—do not tell any one your name till we are home again, or the bad man will be sure to find us out. But if you call me papa he will not know us."
- "My papa is dead," said Alice, in a tone of innocent pathos that touched McDonald's softest sympathies. "They put him in the vault under the church; if I call you papa they will put you there, too."
- "Not yet," he said, repressing a shudder, for the thought of death was his one great terror; "but they will if you do not. Can you walk a little way? Would you like to?"

[&]quot;Yes."

[&]quot;Say yes, papa."

[&]quot;Yes, papa."

THE BEAUTIFUL EQUESTRIENNE.

He put her down, kissing her fair cheek as he did so, and her tiny hand was locked fast in his as they entered Drocburn. The train had reached the station and departed before they arrived at the King's Arms Hotel. The time was two hours past midnight.

Michael had prepared the way for his emissary with consummate care. McDonald was an expected guest, and the attendant who admitted him went at once to the master of the hotel to tell him that the Count Dunault had come. The poacher smiled inwardly at the obsequious attention paid to his imaginary title.

He was shown into a handsome reception-room, and a fire was kindled instantly.

"Mr. Bertram will be down directly, my lord," said the attendant, who was in doubt as to whether he had used a title sufficiently high; "and, in the meantime, if I can bring any refreshment—"

The outcast took his position with easy grace. The luxurious chamber and the attention of a servant aroused his old instincts. He had a striking bearing, and his features were decidedly aristocratic; he was a scholar and had been a gentleman, and his Scotch accent, to some extent destroying his English articulation, gave a character to his language that rendered the part he had to assume not a difficult one.

"Bring a light breakfast," he said, stroking his long whiskers carelessly with his white hand; "and prepare a room next to mine, with communicating doors, if possible. My daughter is tired with her journey."

"Certainly, my lord."

The attendant withdrew. Before the breakfast was ready Mr. Bertram, the hotel-keeper, entered. He commenced with an apology for having retired to rest before his lordship came.

"We are later than I thought to be, Mr. Bertram," said McDonald, with familiar condescension; "so late, in fact, that I fear my daughter will be too fatigned to resume her travel

in the morning. We had to perform the last stage by rail."
"Indeed," said Mr. Bertram, as though he thought a journey
by rail must have greatly wearied his lordship. "The gentleman—the chevalier who did me the honor to instruct me,
mentioned that mademoiselle, your daughter, is in delicate
health."

"Very, Mr. Bertram," he said with a sigh; "her physician ordered constant change, but journeying by train is positively prohibited. Those cushions, please."

The hotel-keeper went to the couch indicated by his guest and stripped it of its damask cushions, which he placed at McDonald's feet before the fire. Simon seated Alice on the soft, warm pile, and drew her head to his knee.

"What visitors have you?" he asked, languidly, as he produced his pocket-book, as though to search for something, and much to his surprise, found what he wanted, but certainly did not expect to see—a card-case, filled with delicately enameled pasteboard, each piece inscribed with the name and title:

"Cymon, Count Dunault."

"Michael forgot nothing," he said, mentally; "if he fail, it will not be through want of precaution."

"Your lordship will not, I trust, take exceptions to the character of the two whom I was, as it were, compelled to receive—professionals?"

The count arched his brows and gave a shrug.

"Professionals?"

"Of a very high class, I assure you," added Mr. Bertram, as if to palliate what he thought might be an offense to his countship. "The great lion-tamer, Mr. George Gambert, quite a gentleman, and Mademoiselle Corinne, a perfect lady. You have heard of her, perhaps?"

"Heard of her!"

McDonald repressed intense excitement; his old aristocratic instincts taught him to control himself before the hotel-heeper.

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- "Formerly Captain Gambert, of the —th dragoons, I think?" he interrogated.
 - "The same, my lord."
- "Ah, yes; I remember—in fact, we were acquaintances, and I shall be happy to meet Mr. Gambert in the morning. Let him have my card, please—and, stay, this meeting may alter my arrangements for a day or two."
- "Then the traveling carriage will not be required to-morrow?"
 - "It will not. You have servants in readiness?"
- "Yes, my lord. I was to provide a suite; a maid for made-moiselle—a French girl."
 - "Ouite correct, Mr. Bertram."
 - "Two postilions and a courier."

The count inclined his head.

- "My friend the chevalier left me in good hands, Mr. Bertram. You have, I am sure, used your experience and discretion in the selection of these people?"
- "I have been very careful, my lord. The postilions and the French maid came from the establishment of the Marquis of Wastewings, and the courier was formerly attached to the French embassy."
- "I shall find them suitable, no doubt. Does the girl speak English?"
- "Not a word, that can be understood; and, unfortunately, we have no one in the hotel who can interpret for her. The chevalier mentioned it as a special feature that I was to engage one not proficient in our—I beg pardon—in the English tongue."

McDonald looked keenly into Mr. Bertram's face.

- "Your lordship will pardon me," said that gentleman, "but your accent is so pure that I forgot, for the moment, I was speaking to a foreigner."
- "The mistake is made frequently, Mr. Bertram. I have been in England a great many years. Send the girl to me when

I ring, and do not forget to let Mr. Gambert have my card."

Mr. Bertram bowed low, and went out as the count's breakfast was brought in.

"This is better than remorseful solitude," thought McDonald when he was alone. "A suite of servants, an equipage, a pocketful of ready money, and ample credit with a Parisian banker. The road to ruin is a pleasant one at times."

He opened and perused a sheet of paper, on which the following words were written in Michael Ewrick's hand:

"Teach her to forget her native tongue—her own identity. Let no harm befall her. Live in Paris, and the vicinity. Assume your character fearlessly. Burn this, and remember."

That was all; he threw the paper into the fire and watched it burn to ashes.

"I shall not forget easily," he muttered; "but I feel less dread now that I am out of his way. It is strange, very strange, that at the outset of my return to the world I should meet George Gambert and Corinne!"

He was so absorbed by the thought that he scarcely noticed Alice, who, wearied with fatigue, was sleeping with her arms twined round and her head leaning against his knee.

"Corinne!" he went on; "I thought J had forgotten her, but by the faint, hot feeling stirring my heart into life, I know that passion does not die out with early youth; and Gambert, my rival then, but too much my friend to urge his own suit, he has won the prize I threw away. Are they married? And what strange freak of fortune has turned him lion-tamer? They are the same—George Gambert and Corinne—and here, after so many years, under the same roof with me."

While his head was bowed in reflection, his gaze rested involuntarily on the slumbering child's fair shoulders, from which, in her attitude of innocent abandonment, her dress had slipped, and as distinctly as an ivory in't in a piece of marble he saw a clearly-defined mark—a tiny caccinx.

"It must have been burned in, and deeply too," he said

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looking at it carefully; "there is no eradicating that. I am glad it is there. Her identity cannot be destroyed while she lives."

A slender chain of gold circled her throat; he drew it forth and found a small gold cross suspended to the end of it. A peculiar thought made him put the cross to the mark on her shoulder. They were exactly alike; the one had evidently been stamped by the other.

On the golden crucifix was graven with rare minuteness the Charnett arms, a closed vizor, a broken sword, and the motto "Destined!" Under this word was a delicate monogram, the letter A. twined between L. and S.

"Destined, indeed," said Simon; "the Charnetts have looked their last upon their ancient glory, and that shattered sword is an emblem of their broken honor. The race seems fated to become extinct."

"Alice," he whispered, waking her tenderly, "try and eat some breakfast, and papa will talk to you about the nice things we shall have before we go back."

He lifted her to his knee. Her pretty head drooped to his breast again.

"Let no harm befall her," he repeated to himself, while looking with irrepressible affection into the beautiful countenance, so like her mother's. "He need not have told me that. Were he not such a demon—were it not that in taking the child back to her mother I should waken his fiendish rage and doom her to a certain grave, I would defy him to the death, proclaim my knowledge of his crime. As it is she is safest with me."

It was good—something to take a few black lines out of the record of his sins to see with what solicitude he tended the fair-haired orphan, coaxing her to eat by dipping pieces of sweet biscuit into his own coffee and putting them to her lips. She was too tired to eat, however; sleep hung heavily on her eyelids; and he ate his breakfast alone, nursing her gently and caressingly as though she was really his daughter.

"Had it been my lot to wed and be sire to such a child," he meditated, "I should have been a better man. I used to laugh at home ties—sneer at men who could toil patiently for wife and family, and think their toil a labor of love. I can understand the feeling now I have this little one in my care."

He rang the bell; a dark-eyed French girl entered on the instant. The count surveyed her from head to foot, and the scrutiny was a pleasant one. She was very pretty, dressed in plain black silk, and wore her hair in a myriad of braids. The poacher read her character at a glance.

- "A well-disposed, warm-hearted girl," he thought, "faithful to a kind master or mistress, but too impulsive. Her instincts are pure enough, but her honesty could not resist severe temptation."
 - "What is your name?" he asked, in French.
 - "Madelen, m'sieu."
- "Well, Madelen, take my daughter to her chamber, and put her to bed without waking her if you can. Your duties are simple. Attend to her every wish, ask no questions about herself or me, and report nothing she may say. An indiscreet or forgetful word will insure your immediate dismissal."
- "M'sieu," pouted Madelen, "her ladyship the marchioness thought me most discreet; and to serve ma'm'selle I will be dumb."

McDonald put Alice into Madelen's arms; he walked with them to the door, and kissed the sleeper's little hand; he heard the French girl showering caresses on her as they went up stairs.

McDonald had a bond for Madelen's discretion. She loved the child already.

It was late in the morning when, after unquiet sleep, the quondam poacher left his chamber, and while at his morning meal with Alice he summoned Mr. Bertram, who, in answer to his inquiry, informed him that Mr. George Gambert had received his card, and did not recognize the name, and being

called away by professional duty, could not hope to see the count till the afternoon.

- "Mr. Gambert would doubtless see you at the hippodrome," suggested the hotel-keeper, "which is well worth a visit for itself. There is a morning performance."
 - "Where is the hippodrome?" asked Simon.
- "It is a magnificent building, my lord, erected on Boscott meadow, opposite the town-hall. I have a pass, if you will do me the honor to avail yourself of it."
- "Thank you, no," smiled Denault; "talent needs more solid support than the applause or censure of the free-list. I am not inclined to enter a place of entertainment without paying the price of admission."

The town was astir when, prompted by the wish to satisfy his longing doubt, McDonald, leaving Alice to Madelen's care, strolled toward Boscott meadow. He saw the building long before he reached it. A circle of flagstaves displaying every known banner, was revolving slowly far above the housetops. The master of the hippodrome evidently went in for novelty.

The town was posted from one end to the other with huge colored placards and bills of leviathan length and breadth, bearing the inscription, "The Beautiful Equestrienne," or a picture representing a well-formed figure lashed to a horse, and underlined with the word, "Mazeppa;" in other places he saw yet larger posters, comprising both picture and inscription, with an addition that rendered the conjunction lucid.

- "Gambert's Hippodrome. Grand classical equestrian and spectacular drama, 'The Wild Horse of Tartary,' Mazeppa, by the beautiful equestrienne, Mademoiselle Corinne."
- "My old friend George a lion-tamer, and Corinne a circus star," he thought, with a smile of bitter melancholy. "The change is almost as great as mine."

He entered the structure, paid half a crown for a reserved seat, and took his place in a chair whence he commanded a good view of the ring. After a few commonplace acts had been

performed, McDonald impatiently looked at the programme.

The next feature was the "thrilling scene," entitled, "The Son of the Desert; or, The Capture and the Lions."

There was a hush, and then a burst of deafening applause as Gambert entered, leading in his two lions. He was a splendid fellow—built with the grace of an Alcibiades and the strength of Hercules. His face was firm and massive, full of power, thought, and will.

His muscular limbs and powerful chest stood out like sculpture. The loose leopard skin that clad him left his arms bare to the shoulders.

McDonald watched him with a look of pleased recognition. It was his old friend, Captain George.

The exhibition was certainly thrilling, and it held the audience with suspended breath to the end. He was supposed to be a captive chief condemned to die by being given to the mercy of two lions, who instead of killing, were subdued by him. He played with them as though they were but large sportive. dogs; engaged in a hand to hand contest with them, and hurled them from him with a strength almost leonine like their own.

The last incident in the scene was unparalleled in its daring. He excited one of the majestic brutes to a pitch of simulated anger that looked dangerously real—it seemed like tempting fate—when the forest monster, lashing his sinewy sides, leapt upon him, bore him to the ground, and with a roar that shook the hippodrome to the roof, stood over him with open jaws.

The women gave faint screams, and the men watched with scared faces, till at a given signal the other lion, in defiance of his own fierce instincts, sprang at its fellow to fight for its human master. The two engaged in conflict, and when they were in the heat of an apparently terrific combat, the tamer went fearlessly between them, separated, and led them off, they walking like docile spaniels by his side.

The building rang with acclamations. Gambert was summoned back again and again to receive loud tributes to his coup-

age. He thanked them with a quiet bow and smile—grateful for the well-earned mark of favor.

An interval of ten minutes was given now, at the expiration of which the curtain was to raise upon Mazeppa.

Simon could remember Corinne in the old times; she had been a poor and pretty actress at the minor theaters in the metropolis. She had no special gift or genius for the stage, but her beauty compensated for lack of talent, and managers found an engagement with her financially a success, in spite of the fact that the critics totally ignored her existence.

Corinne was a true and noble woman then, one who had been tried with much temptation, known what it was to literally hunger for bread, but she lived through the ordeal and came out of the cruicible pure, untarnished gold. She had laughed at love and scorned dishonor. Only one of the many who sought her was received with anything like favor. That one was McDonald.

When the prize was within his reach, he had hesitated. He dared not ask her to be other than a wife, and a sporting gentleman, a military ex-captain, could not descend to marriage with an actress. So, remembering her as he did, he was prepared to see her beautiful, but when she entered first and stood before the sea of faces turned toward her, a sense of suffocation struck almost to the poacher's heart.

Lithe as a leopardess, and full of quivering grace and fire, tall, supple, and magnificently developed, such a form had never hitherto appeared before an audience in such a dress. She was a creature to set an artist thinking or to inspire a sculptor.

"Corinne," McDonald muttered, breathlessly; "Corinne—I have lost her! What a cursed madness it was that made me cast away so peerless a treasure!—for she did love me, she did love me!

"I had the power to subdue her once," he thought, "and it may not be quite lost yet. A meeting will, perhaps, do much. With such a companion, my equipage, and wealth, I should feel I had not come back to the world for nothing."

THE BEAUTIFUL EQUESTRIENNE.

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He watched her with rapture each scene, and when the tain fell the hippodrome seemed a desolation to him. thing he noticed with ungenerous jealousy. Throughout whole of the play, Gambert was the only one who tout Corinne. He enacted a change of characters on purpose he might be the one to lash her to her steed, and unbind when the horse fell at the last.

Simon went to the stage-door, sent in his card, and wai A plain, well-appointed brougham stood outside.

He had not long to wait, George Gambert came fort lady on his arm, closely vailed—Corinne.

"Why, Mac, my dear old friend," said the lion-tamer, a frank glow of pleasure on his handsome face, "this is a surprise, indeed."

McDonald grasped his hand. Corinne checked an imp that, had she obeyed it, would have taken her to Simon's as regained her self-possession, and inclined her head quie McDonald lifted his hat and bowed.

"What a meeting!" laughed George Gambert, wringing poacher's hand again. "I thought you were such good frier Where are you staying now? You must come and dine us. We will have a reunion. By Jove! I remember, no you are the distinguished visitor whose expected coming kept Bertram in a state of agitation for a week."

"I came to the hotel last night."

"And did not wake me! I should not have slept a whad I suspected you were under the same roof. Come."

He placed Corinne in the brougham, and left the seat by side for McDonald, taking the opposite cushion himself.

"We have often talked about you, Mac, wondered wyou were, and if we should ever see you again. You always a favorite with Corinne."

"If you can speak about me to him," thought Simon, 'hope is gone, the past forgotten. Yet she did love me once

CHAPTER XVIIL

GRORGE GAMBERT'S STORY.

The rapid rumble of the brougham wheels over the uneven ground did not give an opportunity for much conversation; Gambert could but intimate his pleasure at the meeting, and McDonald responded with a gladness that found no echo in his breast. The shadow of jealousy was between them.

Until the ride was done the poacher was on the rack. The tie that linked the lion-tamer and Corinne was evidently of a close and tender nature. Yet they were not married, and Simon, who watched them keenly on the way, saw that Gambert's looks and tones were full of a reverential gentleness which was entirely incompatible with the existence of an immoral union.

"The world does not seem to have ill-used you, Mac," observed Gambert, when they were at dinner. "Your carriage and servants are substantial facts, though the title may be visionary—by the way, it seems familiar to me."

"The title?" said Simon, changing color.

"Yes; it is not a bad transition—Cymon, Count Dunault—Simond McDonald. Your own thought, I suppose?"

"I have a patent of nobility," said McDonald, quietly, "but the manner of its coming into my possession must be a secret even from you, old friend, since the secret is not my own."

"Very well, Mac, I have no wish to dive out of my depth, and so that you are the same old Mac to me, I don't care what the name is; but you must pardon my curiosity on one point. Where have you hidden away all this time?"

"In a hermitage, a solitude of my own seeking, where I was happier than I may ever be again."

"Your hermitage could scarcely have been a solitude," laughed Gambert, "since our worthy host told me the Count

Dunault was coming with his daughter. Perhaps your idea of seclusion is Byronic?"

- "By solitude I mean a sultan's, not--"
- "A hermit's with a fair companion. Is that it?"
- "I cannot answer in a word," said McDonald, assuming a tone of melancholy that he knew would be effective in creating interest. "There is so much to explain."
- "Then we will have it after dinner; a chat about the times that were. But why are you restrained with Corinne? You met almost like strangers, and are very little better yet."
 - "The past lies between us," said McDonald, with a sigh.
- "Come, come, Mac; the melancholy hero of a lively melodrama would speak such words in such a tone. The past we'll forget the worst of it and keep the best in memory. Where is the old deviltry you had, the spirit that was up like a flash of fire, and made the dashing Captain McDonald a man not to be trifled with?"
- "Buried with my degradation, I think," responded Simon.
 "My early sins have haunted me, George, and the world appears so strange that I hardly feel as if I belong to it."
 - "I should like to see your child. Is she pretty?"
 - "Beautiful-like her mother."

He saw the quick blood eddy to and sink from Corinne's cheek. The sting went home. He had loved another. The beautiful equestrienne had Gambert's whole affection, but he upon whom she had set the first strong passion of her young womanhood had quite forgotten her.

The lion-tamer was secretly pleased to see their courtesy was without warmth. McDonald had rivaled him once before, and successfully, in Corinne's regard, and though Gambert's faith in her was great, he knew that, were Simon so inclined, he might make his society a perilous temptation.

Corinne rose when the table was cleared.

"I must withdraw," she said, forcing a smile as she gave McDonald her hand. "I require rest between the interval of

two performances, and Mazeppa is not so light as the parts I used to play."

She was gone before Simon had time to more than simply bow, but in the moment that their hands were clasped, he caught a glance that filled him with treacherous delight.

George Gambert's gaze followed her to the door. The beauty of deep love was on his face as she smiled upon him.

"Now that we are alone, Mac," he said, "let us mutually impart—exchange confidence—what we have done since we came to grief on the turf. You have, of course, left that forever?"

"It was my bane, my curse; the cause of bitter infamy and bloodshed. I shall avoid it like a pestilence in future."

"Keep to that, man; and proceed to let me know what you have been doing."

"What have you?" asked McDonald, who wanted time to prepare his story, for he dared not tell the truth.

"Ah, my friend," said Gambert, "mine has been a strange course. I might have been a bad scoundrel but for Corinne. I tired of the turf after our affair. I have no special trait of saint-liness, but I could not descend to the truckling shifts nor digest the loose morality common to the professional betting man. I saw how each day was more shamelessly like the other—the gaming-table, the billiard-board, wine-drinking, debauchery—and I said, 'George Gambert should not be like this.'

"Corinne," he continued, "Corinne did most to make me what I am. It was bruited abroad that I was on intimate terms with the pretty actress who attracted so many of our sex to the theater nightly, and my associates spoke of her coarsely. They laughed openly when I told them she was the best and purest girl I had known.

"'If it be so,' they said, 'why do you go after her? Never mind, old fellow, never kiss and tell. We like you all the better for it,' and so on. The miserable brutes could not comprehend my love. I had not questioned myself as to its nature, we were

so used to look upon women as worse than women should be, that it was looked upon as a natural result that she should be other than she is.

He drew a deep breath in suppressed anger at the thought.

"You who know me," he said, looking at McDonald, "know that I never told a lie—not that I am too virtuous, perhaps, but to lie is to be cowardly. And I swear that in spite of poverty—for she has wanted bread—Corinne is as pure, as peerless, as beautiful as true. I speak her name with reverence, Mac, for she taught me to be myself—to be a man."

The lion-tamer bowed his noble head in honorable tribute to a woman's worth. His manner impressed McDonald; he could respect the devotion that did credit to an honest manhood.

"So I left the turf," Gambert went on, "and took to the stage. There are few educated actors; and though I had not the gift of genius, I could at least respect the author, and interpret his text without descending to gag, or maltreating the Queen's English. My physique did me service; and collecting a company, I came out as tragedian.

"We traveled through the provinces, sometimes with mode-One evening we played a burlesque, which was produced for Corinne's benefit. She represented a character with as many songs and dances, and as little costume, as could Eureka! I had found it. At first I was opposed to her be. appearing befor the public in such slender attire, but Corinne reconciled me to it. We started an equestrian play, and found her beauty more effective than Shakespeare. We traveled, and fell in with a circus company, and I was initiated into the art of lion-taming. Soon afterward Corinne and I accepted a star engagement, one-third of the gross receipts. We were careful of our money, the rest lavished theirs. Finally we bought the circus, and I built the new hippodrome, and now I make twenty thousand a year. In five years I shall be a millionaire.'

"Then?" said McDonald, anxiously.

"Then we shall retire to the sunny South, fulfill Corinne's early

dream—a home of love beneath the soft Italian skies; a realization of some such picture as Claude Melnotte drew to Pauline—a villa by the Lake of Como, and happiness with her."

"Never!" thought McDonald, with a savage feeling of treacherous envy. "I have not come back to the world for nothing, and it would be nothing to me without her."

"I never admired my old friend so much before," he said, smiling with well-assumed frankness at George Gambert. "To think that you have done so much, fought out a bad name, and earned a good one, struggled through adversity, and won riches, while I have wasted time and existence in—"

"Ay, let us have it," said Gambert, "what you have done; and I have no doubt you would have done as much as I had you had the same incentive."

"We are of different temperaments," said McDonald, "and though old comrades, are hardly kindred spirits."

"I don't know," responded Gambert, never for a moment thinking how soon and how bitterly he would prove the bitter truth; "we are kindred spirits as far as most men can be. I only wonder that you ever lost your charm with Corinne, for I am sure she cared for you—she has told me so."

McDonald laughed with affected gayety.

"A piece of charming frankness on the lady's part, certainly, but not pleasant for you."

"Why?" said Gambert. "I knew it. She made it no secret, and she said she should have cared for you very much had not the association been broken."

"If I had ever thought Corinne entertained the least regard for me," McDonald said, still maintaining his aspect of gayety, "I should not think so after this."

"Why?"

"Women never speak of men they really love. Depend upon it, it was as events have proved—you had her real affection, I had only a share of that brilliant coquetry that drew such a crowd around her."

"Do you think so?" said Gambert, pleased at the idea, for his faith in Corinne was very simple-hearted. "Well, I am glad of that. You understand the sex better than I do; but I am very glad, Mac."

"So I see. I remember often to have heard you say you would never love but once."

"I spoke the truth," the lion-tamer said, with grave, earnest intensity. "I tell you, Mac, I should be a lost man were anything to come between Corinne and me. My love is so extreme that I never dare to think of death. If she were dead, I could not live an hour."

"But if she were false?"

McDonald felt sorry for having made the suggestion, as he saw the quick, wild thrill which ran through Gambert's frame.

"If she were false," he said, with slow, distinct articulation, "the very demons who put the falsity into her soul would shudder at such a tragedy as would ensue. I could not let her live; I could not rest asleep while racked by the maddening thought that she belonged to another. My wretched, desolate despair would create a sateless thirst that could be quenched by nothing less than to see her lifeless at my foot."

"And your rival?" said McDonald, watching with curious interest the play of intense passion which made the lion-tamer quiver through and through.

"I should rend him limb from limb," said Gambert, in a whisper, "shred him into fiber, and leave no trace on earth to tell what he had been. But we will drop this, Mac. I wonder that you started such a supposition."

"I merely wish to see what risk I shall run, what kind of man I shall have to deal with," thought McDonald. "For unless I have lost my keen insight into woman's nature, I shall certainly rob you of Corinne."

"I did not think it would so stir you," he said, aloud, speaking in quiet deprecation of the other's excitement. "The loss of a woman's love would not affect me. Death must come to

all, and I should mourn as mourners do were she to die; but were she false, I would let her go with philosophical composure, and think her not worth the trouble of bringing back."

Gambert rose with an expressive gesture.

"What a nature," he said. "How emotionless and lymphatic you must have grown, and certainly I begin to think that, though comrades old and true, we are not kindred spirits. Good-by, for the present, I am wanted at the hippodrome."

"So soon?"

"I have to feed the lions and attend to the general arrangements. If I neglect my duty, the company are apt to follow the example. Will you come this evening?"

"With pleasure."

"Bring Corinne, then. She is not wanted for an hour or so, and I have already over-staid my time."

He went out with his manly stride, leaving in honest confidence his beautiful Corinne to the care of as false a wretch as ever in treacherous anticipation disgraced the name of friend.

Not five minutes had elapsed after Gambert's departure when Corinne entered the room where McDonald sat in meditation. A fierce, impetuous thrill ran through his veins, as, looking up, he saw that he was with Corinne—alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MAN WITH AN EXCELLENT MEMORY.

The faint glow of manly feeling, stirred into life in McDonald's breast at thought of his old association with George Gambert, died away as he gazed upon Corinne.

"We have not met for years," he said, taking her hand, "and both are changed. I wonder you have not quite forgotten me."

Her dark dreamy eyes kindled.

"So beautiful you have grown," he said, with a sigh, "and I seem a worn old man, wasted in energy, sore at heart. In the time that has elapsed since we parted, Corinne, fate has dealt heavily with me."

"It would not appear so," said the equestrienne, taking the seat to which he conducted her. "I should have known you again anywhere."

"A woman's memory is faithful to her friends," McDonald rejoined, with a suggestive emphasis on the last word, "and we were friends, Corinne?"

"Yes," she responded, quietly; "I had but few."

"Nay, many. Young, beautiful, and-"

"Poor. I know mankind better now than I did then—can appreciate the value and the motive of their interest in a possibly pretty woman. The world is a book, McDonald, which experience teaches us how to read."

Her proud lip curled in scorn. The reminiscences of her earlier days, when her beauty and her poverty made her sought by a crowd of unprincipled men, who looked upon her as legitimate prey, restored her self-possession and gave her strength.

"Some were true," suggested Simon.

The equestrienne laughed.

"They had no chance of being false. I trusted none—though I was not aware then, as I am now, that man will perjure his soul for his own purpose. There was but one different to the rest—a noble-hearted, unselfish fellow, in whom I could confide, for he never looked an insult nor whispered infamy."

"And this one-"

"George Gambert. "I wish," she added, regretfully and half aside, "I were more worthy of his regard."

"He loves you, Corinne."

"Loves me! Say that I am his idolatry; call it mad, unreasoning worship, the whole, deep passion of a powerful soul;

the very strength of his affection is sublime—because of its purity."

"And apart from gratitude and respect," McDonald thought, "you do not care for him an atom. I can see it, my splendid Juno. The old dream is not yet faded, and I—well, no wonder that the serpent tempted Eve, if Eve were like you."

"Poor George!" he said, pressing her warm, soft hand; "I am sorry for him."

Corinne trembled. She saw the shadow of the dangerous sea to which she was slowly drifting out.

"Why sorry?" she asked.

"Because his great love is cast away. Brave as he is, generous, magnificent in nature as in form, you have not a single thought for him that is like love."

A low cry—emotional, indignant, but subdued—broke from her, and she tried to wrench her hand away.

"Corinne," he said, partly rising, and speaking with all the intense, quick senses of his nature quivering through his voice, "when I left the world, forever as I imagined, I took with me one regret. Were George Gambert my twin-brother, and you his wedded wife—were to speak as I speak now the most unnatural wrong, I still would say it."

"McDonald !"

"Listen. It was because I left you behind. When in fancy I have pictured you as another's bride, I have felt the keenest torture here. I have heard your voice in the night, and it has been music when all else was mockery. Your face, even in the darkness of my wretched loneliness, was before my sight, and my despairing bitterness has been more bitter because memory would not let me forget what I had lost."

"McDonald," said Corinne, shrinking from him, "think of Gambert."

"If I do, it will be to curse him!" exclaimed the quondam poacher, savagely. "You were mine, Corinne—mine till I was bunted out of London."

The man dared to say so much because he knew his power. There was not a chord in her passionate heart that a word or a look of his had not power to thrill

- "If you loved me so," Corinne asked, "why did you leave me?"
- "Could I stay—in danger, degraded, or could I wish you to share my peril and my shame?".

The traitor made his selfish fear seem like self-sacrifice.

- "I had better have done so than listened to this too late," she said, not shrinking from him this time, though his arm was clasped tightly round her supple waist; "and how can I believe you, since you have loved another since we parted?"
- "Loved another! It is untrue. I have scarcely seen a human face, and I have not so much as spoken to a woman."
 - "But that child—the little girl?"
- "It is not mine," he said, rashly. "Ask any oath you will, and I can swear truly that from the time we saw each other last, I have been faithful to your memory."
- "Whose, then?" Corinne inquired; and he felt her breath on his cheek. "You said she was yours."
- "I said anything," he answered, "partly to pique you, partly that Gambert might have no jealous fear."

The room they sat in was in shadow under the leaden gloom of an autumn sky, at close of day; her face, rich with a dusky glow, rested almost on his shoulder, and her large eyes, swimming darkly in a river of fire, sought and sank before his. The long, burning kiss in which their lips clung was a sacrilege to Gambert's love.

"I have not come too late," he whispered; "you are mine at last. Corinne, you must leave here with me; discard the hippodrome and your present way of life. I hated all the throng whose wretched gaze you glutted with your incomparable face and form. It is desecration."

"But Gambert?" she said, unable, in spite of her hopeless affection for her former tempter, to think altogether without

self-reproachful pity upon her treachery to her devoted lover; "he will go mad."

"Better madness now than misery afterward; he might recover from such an insanity, but the misery would be eternal—and misery would be inevitable, Corinne; for where love is not at first, it cannot grow; and a wife who does not love is but a slave and toy to one who is less a husband than a keeper."

Corinne could not reason with him. She wondered vaguely at his careless, illogical argument, and then her mind reverted to the absorbing truth—McDonald loved her.

"If George were but to suspect," she said, shuddering, as she lay in McDonald's arms, "it would be death to both of us."

He touched her dark cheek caressingly.

"Do not fear. It may be as well, however, not to let him see cause for suspicion. Be, until we go, as kind, familiar, and endearing as you have ever been. It will not be for long."

Quite at his mercy, helpless in passion's thrall, she did not question when or whither he would take her.

But with a woman's instinctive, curious jealousy, she inquired more concerning the child. McDonald found it difficult to answer.

"Is it a relative?" Corinne asked, with her bare, flexible arm round his neck. "And have you told me the truth? There must be no secrets between us, Simon. If you have been so long a recluse, how did she come into your care?"

"I cannot tell you yet," he said, evasively.

Her arm was withdrawn; she put away the hand that clasped her waist.

"To have a mystery," she said, reproachfully; "and yet you ask me to love you."

"Delilah," he said, smiling and drawing her to his side, "if I must tell you all, remember this—if it were known I had divulged the secret, no power on earth could save me from a fate so awful that I dare not think of it. My life, my liberty,

and means of living depend upon the safe keeping of that child and her secret.

His earnestness was evidently the earnestness of truth, and Corinne listened with apprehensive eagerness.

"Tell me all," she said, "and trust me."

"It may be as well," McDonald said, reflectively. "I should be sure to relate the whole history of my past life to you in time, and it had, perhaps, be better told now than bit by bit; but before I begin, Corinne, swear never to betray me."

"Is it needed, Donald?" said Corinne, tenderly.

"Well, then, swear to be mine, and the secret will be ours." She answered solemnly and simply:

"I will take that oath in church, Donald, at the altar."

George Gambert's treacherous rival winced and bit his lip; he had dared to think of the peerless creature with thoughts that were not honorable.

"I scarcely require an oath," he said, lifting her face to kiss her again. "Your devotion to me is sufficient guarantee."

And he told her part of the dark story, concealing the names and places.

"One," he said, "who knows my secret, and could at any time consign me to the hulks, found out my hiding-place, and gave me the alternative to meet my doom or take the child. It is better, I am sure, for her, poor little thing, that I became her guardian. For he is a ruthless wretch, and would kill her without remorse were she in his way."

"How her mother will grieve," said Corinne. "It is a dreadful sin, Donald."

"What could I do? Had I refused to take her, he might have slain her; as it is, she may be restored."

"She shall be," exclaimed the beautiful equestrienne. "Remember, Donald, that if you were in that man's power, he is now in yours. Your fear of this man perplexes me."

"Yet I am no coward," said Simon McDonald. "I have faced death more than once and felt no dread."

"I know," she said, "and wonder the more. You fought a duel with a man who insulted me and shot him dead, yet at the bare thought of him who has driven you to do this wrong you are pale to the lips. Who is he?"

"Do not ask me."

"If we are to be aught to each other," she said, "I must have the entire truth, or I should be haunted by a constant dread that the man whose slave you are might come between us. I could not live so. Tell me his name?"

McDonald warned her to be silent by a gesture. His ear, trained to acute keenness by being long accustomed to the solitude of Charnett Heath, caught the sound of an approaching footstep in the passage.

It paused at the door, which opened, and little Alice peered wistfully in.

Before the astonished child had time to cross the threshold, Corinne lifted her from the floor and rained caresses on her innocent tace.

"Poor, helpless pet!" she said, with pitying gentleness, "so young to be motherless. He would dare much, indeed, who would dare harm you while I can protect you."

Alice, understanding her caressing manner rather than her words, buried her tiny arm in the raven tresses that vailed the equestrienne's sculptured shoulder. Her infantile confidence was won the more readily because Corinne, in many points, resembled the Lady of Charnett.

"I will seek out this mystery," said Corinne, seating Alice on her knees. "The child must know something."

McDonald did not interfere; he saw it would be useless.

- "Tell me what your name is, darling?" Corinne said.
- "Alice," replied the child, stealing a furtive look at Simon. She had not forgotten his instructions.
 - "What else? You may tell me that, he will not be angry." The child was reassured.
 - "Alice Sydney Lois, of Charnett," she said, distinctly.

McDonald was startled. He had not thought she knew her name so well.

"For her sake as well as for mine," he said, "never let her say those words again before a human being."

Corinne iterated the word Charnett—remembrance of the name broke upon her.

- "Why," she said at last, "this is the child of Lord Sydney, who was mur—"
 - "Hush! for mercy's sake," McDonald said, turning pallid.

But Corinne gave a great sorrowful cry—an appalling thought had found its way into her brain.

- "McDonald," she said, "McDonald, if you do not wish to see me fall at your feet and die, say that you did not—did not—"
- "Heaven forbid," he said, clasping his hands together, for he was moved into impressive fervor by the unexpected turn the conversation had taken. "I, though to my misery I know so much about it, am as guiltless of that brutal tragedy as the child is."

"Thank Heaven," said Corinne, fervently, "and forgive my doubt. Do not be frightened, darling."

And then, while soothing Alice, who was alarmed by their vehemence, her brain went to work with that facility of rapid construction which, while it is peculiar to women, is not the less frequently correct that it is totally without logic. It is, as it was with her, the construction of instinct rather than reason.

"Tell me his name," she said; and Simon saw at once the conclusion she had arrived at. "The truth, McDonald."

"I dare not. I have sworn."

"A sinful oath, which must be broken before good can come of it. Tell me his name."

McDonald struggled with a conflict of emotion, passion for her, and his fear of Michael; but the man he feared was absent, and the woman for whom he would have sold himself to Satan was before him.

"A secret to be kept like the grave," he said, "or this is degradation to me—death to her."

"Itshall be secret. But tell me his name."

"It is a terrible thing to make me do, Corinne. An oath, even a sinful oath, brings a curse when broken."

Her gesture—an action full of wild, impatient grace, seeming as it did to imply that the word would either take her to his arms or keep her from him—left him strengthless to retain the secret he had sworn.

"Michael," he said: "Michael Ewrick."

"Michael Ewrick," repeated Corinne. "I shall not forget the name. Michael Ewrick, the man who has driven you to sin, threatened you with the hulks, the scaffold. Michael Ewrick, who has left this lost child of Charnett motherless. Michael Ewrick, who must have had a hand in that dark tragedy. I seem to tremble on the verge of a black abyss, in whose depths that mystery lies, and I could almost say his hand is red with the deed. Michael—"

A low knock, repeated thrice, sounded at the door. McDonald, white with the thought that Corinne had been overheard, leaped to open it, and stood gazing upon the man who confronted him as though in doubt as to whether it would be safe to strangle him or not.

The intruder was unmistakably a Frenchman, and as unmistakably an actor. He wore the inevitably heavy mustache, and the expression which can only be acquired by association with the stage.

In age, he was a few years more or less than thirty. In build, he was about the middle stature, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. His hands and feet were singularly small, and his face, almost repellent in its severe composure, was relieved by a latent gleam of keen, quaint humor.

"How long have you been here?" McDonald said, fixing his heavy hand upon the Frenchman's throat. "Have you been standing outside listening?"

The Frenchman shook himself free, apparently without an effort, and shrugged his shoulders as he gracefully bowed.

"Monsieur will pardon; I bring to Mademoiselle Corinne a request. Monsieur Gambert have forgot his revolver."

Corinne recovered her self-possession in an instant.

"It is only Jaconet," she said; "you were too hasty, Count Dunault. I see what he has come for; George has forgotten his revolver. He always keeps one with him in case either of the lions should turn upon him."

She left the room, and returned in a minute or so with the weapon. McDonald recollected seeing it worn by Gambert in the morning. It was kept in a case of polished leather, and the lion-tamer carried it slung round his neck by a strap of the same material.

Corinne examined the deadly weapon carefully before giving it to Jaconet.

The Frenchman took it with a low bow, and, venturing to smile at little Alice, left the room.

"Is there a message, Jaconet?" Corinne inquired, as Gambert's messenger reached the door.

"Oui-yes, pardon. That mademoiselle will not be late."

"Thanks."

The door closed silently upon the well-bred Frenchman. McDonald turned to Corinne.

"If that fellow overheard us, Corinne, we are lost."

"He heard nothing. He cannot understand or speak two words of English at a time, and he would not descend to eavesdropping. The poor fellow is only a circus clown now, but I assure you he is an aristocrat. He is a political refugee."

"His face looked unconcerned enough," said Simon, somewhat reassured; "but we must be more careful in future, Corinne. It is never safe to speak of such things except in whispers."

"I am sure he heard no word," said the equestrienne, "so do

not let that trouble you. It is time now to go. Alice shall come with us."

Taking the child with her, she went to her chamber to attire herself.

"Ring for my carriage," she said; "I shall not be ten

McDonald rang and gave the requisite instructions. In spite of his desire to assure himself that Corinne had not been overheard, his troubled thoughts concerning Jaconet kept him fully occupied until Corinne reappeared.

Monsieur Jaconet, the clown, walking rapidly through the quiet town of Drocburn, was muttering strangely under his breath, and in his tongue; his mutterings, translated, ran thus:

"Michael Ewrick, I shall not forget the name; Michael Ewrick, the man who has driven you to sin, threatened you with the hulks, the scafford. Michael Ewrick, who has left this lost child of Charnett motherless. Michael Ewrick, who must have had a hand in that dark tragedy. I seem to tremble on the verge of a dark abyss, in whose depths that mystery lies; and I could almost say his hand is red with the deed. Michael——"

"And there she stopped," the clown said, still meditating; "but Jaconet has heard enough—a secret, and such a secret. I wonder what it will be worth to me?"

Before entering the hippodrome, Jaconet wrote in his pocketbook the sentence Corinne had spoken; he set it down word for word; he had an excellent memory.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE.

The abduction of Alice, following as it did so rapidly upon her father's tragic death, threw Charnett into a state of in-

tense excitement once more. The shock left Leonora prostrate. It stunned her faculties into lethargy; the sad truth was too fearful to realize.

The discovery of the crime came soon. James Bingham, when he recovered from Ewrick's savage blow, crawled, like the faithful fellow he was, to Charnett House, with scarcely strength to tell his tale.

Kendrake, in company with Dr. Hamilton, set out at once on the search, and found Ishmael where he had fallen by the steed McDonald had shot. The boy was senseless, but Hamilton soon restored him.

The gallant lad related what he had done without a thought of his own heroism. The forest-keeper shivered inwardly as he heard how Ishmael had tried to ride the stranger down and shoot him as he ran.

"It was the same man, you are sure?" Kendrake asked, as he led the boy home.

"Could I forget him? I know his face, his voice, his fierce black eyes; and I forgot what you told me. I only wanted to save Alice; and I should have done so if that wretch who lives in the hut had not shot my horse. I fired twice at the man with the beard, and I hit him, for I saw the blood upon his face."

The forest-keeper caressed him with grim tenderness.

"We will go together and find her," he said; "but you must not excite yourself just now."

"I will find her if I have to go everywhere. Lady Leonora will hate me—I shall hate myself—if I do not."

"You were in no way to blame," said Doctor Hamilton, struck by the boy's fiery resolution. "Many a man would have done less than you did, for you have given us a clew which may be followed with success. The late inhabitant of the hut shot your horse, you say?"

"The poacher. I hardly knew him at first, but it was he, though he was changed."

- "How changed?"
- 'Dressed like a gentleman-different altogether."
- "The plan was evidently preconcerted, Kendrake," said Hamilton; "and the poacher was waiting to carry out the work began by his more daring confederate. We must have advice—assistance instantly."
 - "Whence-from whom?"
 - "The detective."
- "Doctor Hamilton," Kendrake said, "the man who has left this trail of misery and crime on Charnett is not one to be dealt with by common means. To awaken his suspicion by raising a hue-and-cry would be to seal the child's fate. We must work surely, silently, and keep our purpose known to the few who can be trusted."
- "But every hour's delay takes the little one farther from her mother."
- "It is not a question of time or distance. The miscreant would baffle Satan's self, had he the initiative. We might set the entire machinery of Scotland Yard in action, search every foot of ground in England by to-morrow, and be no nearer to the lost one than we are now."
 - "You speak as if convinced."
- "I speak a terrible truth. You cannot see, as I do, the hidden hand that is doing this work in darkness."
 - "Why not act upon your knowledge?"
- "I shall when the time comes. We shall see more evil before we can move in safety. Those deeds that have been done lately—the murder of Lord Sydney, the intrusion at midnight into Lady Leonora's chamber, and the abduction of the child—are but threads leading to the center of a web set to ensnare my foster-brother's wife and rob her-child of the inheritance. Work with me, wait with me, and we shall save them yet."
- "With such a purpose in view," said Hamilton, "I will do anything."

They said no more till Charnett House was reached, and the

doctor had tended the faithful groom and the gallant boy. Neither had received any lasting injury, but both were badly shaken for the time.

Hamilton's next care was then to reassure Leonora. He previously conferred with the forest-keeper on the subject, and bear arrived at the same conclusion. The child's life was in no danger unless her abductor were driven to desperation.

Yet Kendrake's heart misgave him as he recalled his fosterbrother's words—the sad, brief sentence that expressed so much and seemed so significant now.

The keeper could see the white, wistful face of the disinherited before him, and to his fancy the faint syllables came to him like an echo from the grave.

"Should I be forgiven, the inheritance will revert to my wife and child; and there will be but one frail life, a child's, between the rich estate and any one who may covet it."

"Being so well acquainted with the family history," Kendrake said, "you will see with me to what these crimes are tending. The worst feature we have to contend against is the very daring that gives to truth an aspect of the wildest improbability. Clearly, Lord Sydney and the child were obstacles in the way of some one who covets the property. There we have the motive."

"I have thought of that," said Hamilton, reflectively. "There is more in this than you and I can deal with. To search for the little one, I am, as you are, convinced would be futile. I must see her ladyship's solicitors, Messrs. Pentland & Snell."

"What can they do?"

"Much. They are men of honor and large experience. They are used to dealing with intricate cases, and would fathom out the mystery here."

"I can do that," said the keeper, gloomily; "I can do that."

"Ay—but they can do more. They will follow each clew through its legitimate channel, and in every way render invalua-

ble aid. In one thing they have power, which may prove her ladyship's salvation—should a new claimant come, they can contest his right and hold him at bay until——"

"Until we have avenged Lord Sydney and restored his child her home. Can they do that?"

"The law has curious processes," said Hamilton, in reply, "and the man who might steep himself to the lips in sin, for the sake of clearing his path to Charnett, would hesitate before taking the final step. Judicial investigation is very strict and searching, and he who cannot bear its scrutiny had better never challenge it."

"He would not shrink," said the keeper, inadvertently.

"He!—who?" asked the doctor, in surprise. "Do you identify any one?"

The keeper shook his head.

"I shall fulfill my destiny," he said, with somber gravity.

"It is a bitter one, but I shall not shrink. I have to keep two oaths, both deeply sworn, but sworn to the dead; and each one is a barrier to the other. I am on the trail of the assassin, and I may direct the shaft that brings him down, but I may not strike it in."

"Strange, inscrutable man," mused the doctor, mentally. "What secret does he hold to have so changed him, for the alteration in him is greater than the deepest grief could have effected? To question him were useless, yet he evidently knows much."

Kendrake turned his somber face away, and gazed into the night gloom that overhung Charnett Hills. He was thinking, lost deep in reverie, in which he saw the strange, stern, sad work fate had set him.

He was sworn by an oath to his dying sister not to lift his hand in wrath against her betrayer, the father of her bcy. He was sworn to avenge his foster-brother's hapless fate—hunt the assassin down—drag him to his doom.

And the man he had sworn not to lift his hand against was

the man he had sworn to kill. Michael Ewrick, Ishmael's sire—Michael Ewrick, Lord Sydney's slayer.

No trace of the lost child was found, though tireless, vigilant search and inquiry were made for her till morning. The entire village was in commotion. The tenantry showed their respect for their lady by the active interest they took in the task of seeking. Many a sturdy yeoman went on foot or in the saddle, each eager to be the first to bring glad tidings home.

Mr. Uxley presented himself at an early hour, and expressed much consideration. He was received by Kendrake.

"A very sad and strange affair," he said; "perhaps the most extraordinary thing that has ever come before me in the whole course of my experience."

The keeper, who could not conquer his instinctive doubt and dislike of the lawyer, did not reply with too much courtesy.

- "Her ladyship is not seriously overcome, I trust," he continued, to fill an awkward pause left by Kendrake's silence.
 "If I can be of any assistance——"
- "Her ladyship cannot be seen, Mr. Uxley, and I have no suggestion to offer. Your legal experience will possibly enable you to apply your energies in the best manner to the occasion."
- "Just so, Mr. Kendrake—decidedly; but as her ladyship's solicitor——"
 - "Your pardon."
 - "As her ladyship's solicitor-"
- "I was not aware you officiated in that capacity. Her ladyship's solicitors are Messrs. Pentland & Snell."
- "As her ladyship's solicitor," persisted Uxley, "till I am instructed otherwise, it is my duty to act in this matter, and I therefore must request to be supplied with such information as may have resulted from the search."
- "Seek it, then, Mr. Uxley, at the proper source. I thought you came to give information, not to seek it."

- "Give-how?"
- "Out of your experience," said the forest-keeper; "it may be wanted of you yet."
- "That is an ambiguity," said Uxley, striving to retain his self-possession in spite of an uneasy feeling within him. His nerves were not well strung. The memory of a white face going down a well had somewhat shaken them.
- "I hope to be able to dissipate the ambiguity soon," Kendrake said.
 - "Soon?"
 - "When we find two men."
 - "Two men," iterated the lawyer.
- "The one who stole the child—he can be identified—and the one to whom he gave her."
 - "Can he be identified, too?"
- "Easily. The late inhabitant of the old hut on the heath, Simon McDonald, is sufficiently well known to be recognized. Now you have your information and can act upon it."
- "I shall, indeed, and at once," exclaimed Uxley, startled for the moment out of his usual equanimity. "Had I known this much before, I should not have lost a minute. That information, if acted upon instantly, may strongly affect the matter."
- "Doubtless," muttered Kendrake, seeing distinctly the lawyer's double meaning. "But I shall act upon it in a different way, and if we chance to clash, so much the worse for you."

Uxley was already in the saddle, and urging his old gray horse down the avenue at a pace which must have considerably astonished that venerable animal. At any other time and under any other circumstances the picture presented by horse and rider would have made the keeper smile.

"Now to see O'Neil," John Kendrake thought. "I wonder he has not been to me, for he must have heard of this ere now."

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Intending to consult the young Irishman, the keeper went to the Falcon's Nest, where O'Neil had taken up his abode. Kendrake heard with much surprise that he had not returned since the preceding evening.

"Is it that he is already on the track?" reflected Kendrake; "and, like a good, thoughtful fellow, would not even lose a minute's time to tell me. It must be so."

Yet he felt vaguely uneasy.

"He went out early in the evening, you say?" he asked, addressing the hostess of the Charnett inn.

"Some time before dark, Mr. Kendrake," replied Mrs. Scofield. "And my husband thought it odd he did not come back, for he was going to smoke a pipe with him. I am sure we never thought to lose him so sudden-like; not that we care for the little owing, for he's a gentleman I'd make welcome and glad, winter and summer, too, for nothing."

"It must be so," the keeper mused. "He may have been on the heath when Alice was stolen. It would have been about the time, and, perhaps, he followed. I hope nothing has happened to him."

He thanked the comely landlady, and answered with patient courtesy a few of the hundred questions her curiosity caused her to ask, and declined her proffered refreshment.

"I shall hear from him before the day is over," thought Kendrake, still thinking of O'Neil, "or he may return. I don't know why it should, but his absence troubles me."

Later in the day Dr. Hamilton, true to his promise, took the train for London.

A curious expression swept over his countenance, as, on his way to the Lockstone station, he passed Reuben Uxley's house.

"Pentland will settle with him," the doctor meditated; "and if he is half the traitor I suspect, the balance will not be in his favor. But we can show no mercy to the enemy, they have shown none to us."

Michael Ewrick, being with the lawyer in one of the upper

rooms, saw the doctor's brougham roll past. Hamilton did not see them; they were shaded from observation by the curtained window.

"One of the witnesses," Michael said, with a dark smile, "to the compact between Lord Robert and the colonel when my birthright was bartered."

"Where can he be going?" queried Uxley. "Perhaps to London, to see the solicitors."

"A good reason why we should go too."

The lawyer gave a silent affirmative.

"Then I go to-night," said Michael; "and Charnett will not see the Chevalier de Buradoc again, but Michael Ewrick will come soon to claim and take possession of his own. By the way, are you at all nervous?"

"No. Why?"

"Because you will have this old house all to yourself, except for your ancient domestic and our friend in the well. I breathe more freely now that he is quiet. He was a dangerous foe."

"I fear the living more than the dead," said Uxley, though his nervous lips and pallid face gave his words the lie.

Michael left for London by the night train. The stars were out, the road pleasant, and he resolved to walk to Lockstone. Uxley went with him to the station.

"In two days," Ewrick said, as he entered one of the cars.
"I have work to do until the expiration of that time, but I shall meet you there."

"I will come."

The engine started, the long line of carriages went up the iron track, and Reuben retraced his solitary way to Charnett.

It was near midnight.

He felt singularly lonely, and a chill was at his heart as he went into his house. The mysterious presence of his hidden victim seemed to fill it with spectral terror.

"I grow weak," he thought, "and tremble at a shadow. I

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never gave way to a superstitious fancy before, and I must conquer it now; yet I wish the deed had not been done here."

Compelled by an irresistible fascination, urged by a morbid, haunting desire to look upon the scene of his and Ewrick's crime, he crept to his study on tiptoe, as if afraid to wake the dead.

The room was in semi-darkness—the shaded lamp burned dimly. The door, as it creaked behind him and shut of its own accord, made his hair rise with a sense of dread he could not subdue.

The old church clock struck twelve.

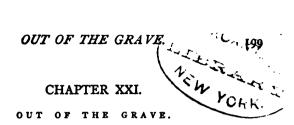
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"I did not wish it done," he muttered, for conscience was conjuring awful phantoms in the echoes and the gloom. "He sought his own fate, and Michael slew him. I—merciful Heaven—"

And then he stopped, with a loud, long shriek, like a lost soul going to perdition, for in the chair to which he had felt his way there sat a silent figure with a dabbled face.

The old man sank upon his knees and put his hands before his brow to shut the sight away. It was no fancy, for when he looked again it still sat there—silent, stirless, with dabbled face and accusing eyes. Robert O'Neil had risen from his untimely grave, to haunt the gray-haired, sinful wretch who had helped to slay him.

It was too much to see, too much to look upon, and not go mad or die. The old man tried to rise and totter away, but the mighty horror overcame him quite. Strength went from nerveless body, sense from swimming brain. He fell prone to the floor, at the feet of the silent figure with the dabbled face, whose haunting eyes were looking at him.



The sky was gray with the somber night-clouds fading before a cheerless dawn, when Reuben Uxley came to his senses after the terrible vision he had seen. The chair was empty now, the silent figure with the dabbled face was gone.

The old man's terror went as daylight came and Charnett grew busy with the hum of life.

He tried to think what he had seen was but a dream; but it was too deeply impressed on his brain.

Then another thought came.

Was the silent figure really an unearthly visitor, the disembodied soul of his and Ewrick's victim come from its dark den of crime because it could not rest in such unhallowed ground? Or had not Michael's hand done its work surely?

To end suspense, and be assured, know what he had to guard against, and what to dread, the lawyer touched the hidden spring that opened the trap, and peered down into the deep darkness.

He could see nothing clearly; but the reality was there, or fancy shaped it indistinctly. The shadow of a human form, huddled in a heap as it would have been after falling through the floor.

He shuddered as he closed the trap, but the shudder was succeeded by a sigh of relief. He stamped upon the trap as if defying the huddled form beneath; but the hollow echoes of the blow he struck awoke such suggestive sounds that he did not stamp again.

He left the study and went to the front door. His nerves were not so steady as they were wont to be. A mouse that had been quietly nibbling at his parchments was scared by the noise he made, and scampered away. The sound caused Uxley to cross the threshold at a leap.

Uxley was glad to be out in the free atmosphere. He opened the battered wooden gate that formed the way of entrance to his forecourt, and stood upon the pathway of the lane. He nodded and spoke pleasantly to a wagoner who went past with his team. Anything was better than thinking in silence.

"Good-morning, sir," a voice said.

The lawyer's instinct, and not his recollection, recognized the gentleman who confronted him. They had met before.

The stranger was a handsome fellow, with curly light brown hair, long, silky mustache, beard, and whiskers of the same hue, a low, broad forehead, and rather heavy temples for his quiet face.

"I think I have had the pleasure of seeing you," said Uxley, with a smile, won from him by the other's frank expression.

"Certainly you have. I was here last year, staying at the Charnett Inn. Perhaps you will recollect my name."

He set down his stick, on which hung a tourist's valise and sketch-book, and, producing a plain morocco card-case, handed Uxley a card. It was inscribed simply with a name—"Mr. Alfred Hewbert, R. A.

"You see I have no special local habitation," he said, smiling; "I'm a sort of vagrant traveler in search of the picturesque, and I preser a pedestrian tour to a journey by locomotive. I have had three hours' sleep, and walked sourteen miles since midnight."

"Really," said Uxley, in a tone of interest, "you must be tired."

"Not a bit. Let me see, it is now seven o'clock; I shall find the inn open."

"Yes; but we have met before, and need not stand on ceremony. Let me invite you to such hospitality as my poor house affords."

"Thanks, but no; at least not this morning, if you will pardon me. In the afternoon, perhaps, if I stroll this way."

"You will be very welcome."

Mr. Hewbert bowed.

"I should be glad to stay," he said, "for a cup of coffee is a good restorative after a walk through the night dew, but I am anxious to reach the inn; I have a friend staying there. Poor old Bob. I shall take him by surprise, coming so unexpectedly. But he knows I am erratic, and will be delighted to see me."

"Undoubtedly," said Uxley. "You have not met for some time, mayhap?"

"We have not," responded the communicative R. A.; "but I like the village, and he has taken a fancy to it. He came when the inquest was held on that curious affair—somebody was shot at the keeper's lodge. I am going to make a sketch of it."

"Indeed?"

"And Bob seems quite interested in the matter, by the way he wrote about it. You may have met him. He has been here more than a week."

'Possibly, but not to my knowledge."

"I think he mentioned you," said Mr. Hewbert. "He is collecting scraps of local history—he has an inclination that way. He spoke of you in the very highest terms, and said he had discovered the veritable oldest inhabitant, who had promised him a deal of information."

Mr. Reuben Uxley went cold to his fingers' ends.

"Meaning me," he said, forcing a faint laugh. "Well, I have the experience of five-and-thirty years, spent entirely in Charnett, but I do not remember your friend."

"No? That is strange. He said you were becoming quite intimate together."

"If I heard his name-"

"O'Neil-I call him Bob. Robert O'Neil."

Had Mr. Uxley been suddenly and without his knowledge placed in contact with the conducting wires of an electric battery in full action he could not have been more startled. The

name, spoken so carelessly, struck his ear like a warning bell of fate. The living had come in quest of the dead. Nemesis was on the track of crime.

"O'Neil," he repeated, his heart sinking like a weight of ice, and his eyes quailing before the steadfast gaze of Hewbert, whose white fingers were caressing his wavy whiskers; "I remember now I did meet the gentleman."

"So he told me. Good-morning, Mr. Uxley. You do not look so well as when I saw you last. Early rising does not seem to agree with you."

Slinging his stick with valise and sketch-book over his shoulder, Mr. Alfred Hewbert, R. A., strolled down the lane toward the Falcon's Nest. He had not gone far before he began to sing in a rich, clear-toned voice, and, by a strange coincidence, he struck upon the very tune—the Parisian street ditty—which Robert O'Neil had introduced into Charnett.

"Would that Michael were here," muttered Uxley; "would that Michael were here. This man is a new danger. He has not come without a purpose, I am sure."

When Hewbert reached the inn, Scofield was just about to start with his coach, but no sooner did he see the artist than he left his astonished passengers and clambered from the box, exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Hewbert, if you had only waited another hour you could a rode down with me."

"Thanks, old friend, and how are you? But I enjoyed the walk, and I wanted to be in time for breakfast with O'Neil. I know he has an early appetite."

After a few other congratulatory remarks, Scofield remounted the stage-box, saying:

"Good-by, sir; I must be off. Tell dame to make you comfortable. She'll look after you like she does after Mr. O'Neil. I forgot to say he ain't been home all night."

The last words were uttered as the coach rolled swiftly away.

The artist answered with a gesture of surprise as he entered the old-fashioned, inviting hostelry.

He went in with the free confidence of one sure of a welcome, greeted Mrs. Scofield cordially, patted Jem's wife's rosy check, kissed Jem's little girl, whose "pictur" he had painted, stroked the huge head of a big slumbering dog, a docile, lazy mixture of blood-hound and mastiff, and seated himself finally in the snuggest seat in the room behind the bar.

"So Bob has not been home all night," he said, "which is very bad behavior on Bob's part. We must talk to him."

"Surely, sir," said Mrs. Scofield, "it seems such a pity that Mr. O'Neil, who was always speaking about you, should have gone away only last night. I am sure he would be pleased."

"Why, yes, we are capital friends, Bob and I. People used to think it strange once to see one of us without the other, and whenever he got into a scrape I was always delighted to see him out of it. I wonder if he will come back?"

"Surely, sir, I hope so. If he only knew that you were coming."

"He did."

"Did you see him, sir, when he told you?"

"Well, we exchanged communications on the subject, and I shall feel very much surprised if he does not come back."

"So shall I, sir, and hurt too, though not for the sake of the little bill if he wasn't to come till doomsday, as I told Mr. Kendrake this yesterday, when he came to inquire about him. He seemed very uneasy about Miss Alice, poor dear, natural enough, being stolen away only the night before last."

"Stolen ?"

"It's dreadful, and so soon too after Lord Sydney's and the earl's funeral—a sad time for her ladyship, a bad time for Charnett, every one in mourning, and trade very dull."

"Who is Kendrake? I have heard the name."

"The forest-keeper. Lor' bless you, sir, her ladyship's right hand now, so the servants say; which is not strange, seeing that

him and our dear, unfortunate young master were brothers, as one may say. Of course you have heard about it?"

"The tragedy—yes, give me a little brandy, please. I had a fall last night, and feel rather shaken."

"Were you hurt?" asked the hostess, with much concern.

"Not badly. I take things as they come, rough and tumble, and I manage to get through the world with an entire physical system somehow. I have a hunter's appetite, Mrs. Scofield."

A bountiful repast was rapidly prepared and set before him, and he set to with a gusto that showed he had not overrated his appetite.

"The welcome is not the least enjoyable part of this," he said, dispensing with knife and fork while he picked a succulent wing. "You brew splendid coffee, dame. It has the real aroma, and does not bear that remarkable resemblance to mud peculiar to English coffee in general. And this chair! I never truly felt the luxury of repose till now."

"You were very pale when you came in, Mr. Hewbert."

"I was very tired-I shall be better after breakfast."

Though he did his best to subdue his eagerness, he could not altogether hide his keen hunger. He ate like a man who had not touched food for many hours.

"Have you been far up the road, sir?"

"No," he said, with an inexplicable look on his fair, frank face. "I went down—a very bad road too, I assure you."

"That's toward Limport Hollow then. I've heard some say it's the worst bit of road within six miles."

"Not so bad as the bit I traveled down."

"Where did it lead to, sir."

"Out of the world," he said, with a mirthsome laugh. "Let Susan bring me a cushion when I have done—I will have a nap. This chair is particularly easy, and I am very tired."

"There is a great difference in chairs, Mr. Hewbert—that's comfortable."

"There is a great difference in chairs," he said, putting his hand to his brow, as though it ached "The last one it was my fate to occupy was most unpleasant sitting. What a breakfast I have eaten!"

"It's the air, sir—fresh and bracing just this time of the year, especially after a walk."

"As I came along," he said, with involuntary earnestness, "I thanked Heaven for the fresh air and the sunshine—the daylight—the green sward, and the vast, glorious sky above. Nature never seemed so beautiful to me as it did this morning."

"Yes, sir; and a dull time, too; but then you artist gentlemen have such queer fancies about the weather. Have you quite done, sir?"

"Quite, thank you. I shall be asleep in a minute. Don't let any one disturb me."

"I won't, sir. How tired you look, to be sure. Why not go up to bed for a few hours?"

"No, I want to see what has become of O'Neil. A brief time for rest, and then I shall be ready for the campaign."

"Shall I wake you if Mr. O'Neil comes?"

The artist let his head drop back upon the cushion Susan brought, and closed his eyes.

"Do," he said, quietly; "though the probability is if Mr. O'Neil should come while I sleep, I shall wake immediately."

Not many seconds had passed before he was sleeping calmly, like a child. He certainly was very tired.

The deep, weary slumber was upon him when the forest-keeper, who had grown more uneasy about his friend O'Neil, entered the inn to inquire whether he had returned.

"Not come nor sent a message," Kendrake said, responding thoughtfully to the negative that answered his question. "It is strange."

"So his friend thinks," said Mr. Scofield, opening the door quietly, to let the keeper look at Hewbert. "I am sure Mr.

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O'Neil would be sorry to think he had gone when that gentle man came."

Kendrake gazed upon the sleeper curiously. He was prepossessed instinctively in his favor.

- "The face seems familiar," he said; "he is no stranger."
- "Lor, no, sir; he came last year, and had a very pleasant time with us."
- "I must have seen him, then. My memory for faces is good, though I could not have seen him often."
- "Maybe, sir; we do remember some people better than others."

The artist had slept his weariness out, as the keeper's voice awakened him, for he opened his eyes at this moment, and regarded Kendrake with cool unconcern.

CHAPTER XXIL

THE ARTIST AND THE GAMEKEEPER.

There was not the faintest trace of recognition in the gaze the artist cast upon Kendrake.

- "This gentleman has come to see after Mr. O'Neil," said the hostess, effecting an introduction.
- "Ah!" said Mr. Hewbert, rising, "then Bob is a friend of yours?"
- "One whom I was very sorry to lose so suddenly," said Kendrake; "and I had not the least idea it was his intention to depart."
- "He may have departed without any intention," suggested the artist. "He is slightly erratic—a feeling which we share. But you seem troubled about him."
- "I am. I am convinced that only an affair of serious or singular consequence would have taken him from Charnett at such

brief notice, for he was engaged with me in a matter of deep interest, and I wanted his help at the present juncture."

"Bob does not leave his friends in the lurch as a rule," remarked Mr. Hewbert, "and I am surpised at him. If it is anything in which I can act in his stead, I shall be happy to place myself at your disposal."

The keeper thanked him, but shook his head. The fair-haired, careless artist hardly appeared the kind of man to enter into such a task as the keeper had before him.

"At any rate we can have a chat about him," said Hewbert, putting his cap on, "and I may be able to judge of his intention by what I hear."

Kendrake assented involuntarily. They left the inn together, conversing like intimates before many minutes had passed.

"O'Neil gave considerable attention to the events that have so recently startled the good people here," observed Hewbert.

The artist's habitual nonchalance of manner seemed like levity when he spoke of the terrible tragedy.

"He did," said Kendrake, gravely.

"He is a peculiar fellow in some things," Hewbert continued, "and I have wondered at him occasionally. The study of crime is a passion with him, and I believe he often goes near to the truth when, as he invariably does, he forms a hypothesis."

By this remark it would have seemed that the artist was ignorant of O'Neil's real vocation, and yet he professed to know him well.

Kendrake was on his guard. It occurred to him that the young Irishman's supposed acquaintance might be one of the enemy.

"When he last wrote to me," the artist went on, "he said he was on the brink of an important discovery concerning Lord Sydney's fate; and by the tenor of his letter, I think he saw an impending danger, for he made rather a peculiar remark in conclusion."

[&]quot;What was it?" inquired the keeper, anxiously.

"This: 'If I should be among the missing when you come down, keep a sharp lookout for me in Charnett,"

"Ha!" cried John Kendrake, "then my misgiving is wellfounded. He has gone too keenly, and with too much daring on the track of the miscreants, and something has happened to him. By Heaven! a thought that I have had grows into certainty. He went to see Reuben Uxley the night before last."

"I spoke to that respectable old gentleman this morning, and he did seem uneasy when I mentioned O'Neil's name."

"That is the clew, then," said Kendrake; "he lives in a strange old house, and years ago there were strange stories told of it. We will see him."

"We will," repeated Hewbert, "go to him boldly, and say O'Neil called upon him two evenings since. We shall see by his face whether we have hit the mark."

"I cannot but think we should have heard from him before this if all were well," the keeper said; "even if he is concerned in what took place last night, he might have sent a messenger."

Mr. Hewbert acquiesced in silence. He grew thoughtful as they neared Uxlev's house. The lawyer was at the gate conversing with a mounted constable.

"Any news yet, Mr. Kendrake?" asked the latter, touching his hat respectfully.

"No, none," replied the keeper, briefly.

"We think we shall be on the way," said the constable, a not unintelligent type of his class. "Mr. Uxley has put me on the There's been a stranger hanging about lately, but he hasn't been seen since the young lady was run away with. shall get a warrant for him."

"There have been two strangers," said the keeper, steadily: "which do you mean?"

"Not the foreign gentleman—his, Mr. Uxley's, friend—but the other."

"The other is my friend, and I have come to look for him." The lawyer changed countenance. He sell that Kendrake's visit, in company with the artist, who in the morning had hummed O'Neil's ditty, boded him no good.

"I should like to find him," said the constable. "I am going now to get a warrant from Sir James to apprehend him. Mr. Robert O'Neil's the one I mean, whose ever friend he is."

"You will not have to look far for him, my friend," said Hewbert; "he has not left Charnett yet."

"How's that, sir, if you are sure?"

"I am morally certain, and so is Mr Uxley. Talking of apprehending O'Neil on a charge of having stolen the heiress of Charnett is a piece of transparent absurdity, that does little credit to his legal acumen. Mr. O'Neil was here long after the child was taken away on the night in question."

"Here!" shouted Uxley.

"Here. I saw him enter the house."

The announcement astounded Kendrake as much as it did the lawyer.

"And if I were not certain of his safety, I should think his disappearance very strange," the artist added; "but as it is, I can only, on my friend's behalf, refute the absurb charge made against him, and suggest to the constable that he had better turn his attention in another direction."

Kendrake checked the surprise he felt at the artist's words and manner, that grew more and more singular as he proceeded.

"Come, Mr. Kendrake," he said, abruptly, "let Mr. Uxley dwell upon what I have said, and make the best he can of it."

There was a gleam of menace in the frank, fair face, and quiet, inscrutable eyes, that turned for a moment on the lawyer's. Then the artist linked his arm in Kendrake's, and went with them toward Charnett House. He sang a few bars of the Parisian street ditty while yet within hearing.

Uxley would rather have heard a funeral dirge.

"Danger," thought the lawyer; "there is danger in that man.

Michael must know of this to-morrow."

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- "I would speak a few words with you in private," said Hewbert to his newly-formed acquaintance, when they had proceeded some distance.
- "With pleasure—accompany me; but tell me this—you said you were certain of O'Neil's safety."
- "So I am," laughed Hewbert. "I can account for every moment of his time since he entered the lawyer's house two nights ago."
 - "You were in Charnett, then, and saw him?"
- "As plainly as you see me now. He was in danger of following your foster-brother, John Kendrake. Let us enter your lodge."

They were at its door now. Kendrake thrilled with a sad sigh as he crossed the threshold.

- "Now tell me," he said, "of O'Neil. Where is he now?"
- "Not far away. Shall I tell you what happened to him?"
- "I am very anxious to know. What was his danger?"

The lodge was quiet. There was no fear of interruption when Hewbert began his recital. He went minutely into detail.

"Death!" he said, "and never was jeopardy so near to him. He must have died but for me. Look here."

The artist pushed the light-brown hair from his low, broad forehead, and showed an ugly scar.

- "The Chevalier de Buradoc did that," he said.
- "When?"
- "As I was clinging with my fingers to the edge of the floor, dangling in blank space, with a fall of forty feet beneath me."
 - "Where was that?"
- "In Mr. Uxley's study, over the old well; a story about which is a bit of local legendary lore, but not so dark a story as the one I could tell. I am glad that up to this point you have not recognized me, Kendrake. I want to hide my identity safely, for the sake of Mr. Uxley and the chevalier."

The speaker was a splendid actor—a very Proteus, with perfect command over facial expression and voice, and a marvelous facility of assuming every trifling idiosyncrasy natural to the character he filled for the time.

The artist changed as if by magic. The fair brown wig and handsome whiskers he removed at a touch were not all the disguise—the countenance relaxed and grew strikingly familiar; the voice deepened and grew familiar, too. Kendrake caught his hand with an eager cry. Alfred Hewbert, R. A., was no longer there.

The keeper stood face to face with Robert O'Neil, who had come living out of the grave.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LONDON BIRD OF PREY.

While listening to the young Irishman's terrible story, John Kendrake felt to the full what terrible necessity there was to act with watchful promptitude against such foes—men whose subtlety and pitiless daring shrank from no crime.

"I had a strange misgiving," the forest-keeper said; "it was like a presentiment that something evil had befallen you. The wonder is that you escaped at all."

"My work is not done yet," O'Neil rejoined, as he replaced his light-brown wig and wavy whiskers. "It is written, I believe, that I shall live to hunt Ewrick down. It is my fate."

"So Uxley is in league with him?" Kendrake observed.

"That gray-haired miscreant! There is one of the mysteries in human nature, Kendrake, how a man may live to old age with the spirit of murder in his soul, and yet perhaps never do a wrong, never hurt a fellow-creature, till circumstances wake the sleeping devil, and a red deed is done. Who would think Reuben capable of perpetrating such a sin?"

"And with such consummate, cold-blooded premeditation," said the keeper, "you were thoroughly launched into the jaws of death."

"Ay, but my time is not come. I tell you, Kendrake, we had a fight for it—the chevalier and I. He is strong; I am not weak; and we were fairly matched enough; but my foot slipped into the treacherous trap, and then it was all over with me, Michael looked like the arch fiend as he held me by the throat, with the old man peering over his shoulder. I said a prayer as I went down."

"He struck you heavily?"

"Twice!" and the quiet face, the clear, low voice expressed a depth of sleepless hatred that made the keeper marvel—"twice. I said a prayer as I went down, and I lived a long time in that swift passage in the dark. My brain was reeling with dizzy sickness, but my hands were clutching instinctively at something to cling to, and I caught hold of a rope—one evidently arranged to assist the safe descent of any one going down at a more leisurely rate than I went. I clung to it with the tenacity of death; it was my sole chance of life.

"I am generally equal to the occasion, whatever the occasion may be," he went on, "and neither nerve nor strength quite failed me then. I knew I could not cling to it long, so I slid down as gently as possible. I found my revolver at the bottom of the well; it had dropped down when my foot slipped. I seized it gladly enough; then I fainted.

"Hours must have passed before I came to my senses. I could see nothing in the black, impenetrable gloom. The place smelt like a charnel-house, and I feared I should be suffocated; but ventilation is provided in some peculiar way. I had this leather flask of brandy in my pocket, and a deep draught revived me—gave me temporary vigor—and I resolved to climb the rope—see if I could open the trap and have another battle for my life, if necessary.

"After climbing the rope, I spent a patient, wretched hour trying to find the spring. I dared not make much noise, for there were voices in the room. I heard what may be useful to us both; for Michael and his accomplice discussed their plans

ly, and at the proper time I shall astonish them with the exof my information.

I might have heard more, but nature could not withstand fatigue of holding to the rope; I had to slide down again rest.

I did not despair, though I tried several times to find the et spring, and each time had to relinquish the attempt and

I grew desperate at last. I heard Michael and the lawyer out together, and then I tapped with the butt of my pistol he trap until I struck a round piece of metal. I felt certhat must be the lock, and I was about to shatter it with a when at the pressure of my weapon's muzzle it opened of wn accord. I staggered into the room and closed the trap. It was nearly twelve o'clock. I had been six-and-twenty in that den, and I was faint with hunger and with loss of d. I finished my brandy and sank into a chair, and there it till I heard the chimes of midnight from old Charnett ich.

Uxley came back while the hour was striking, and when I d his footstep coming I knew exactly what effect my apance would have upon him. He saw my face white, and tly, and smeared with the blood from my wound. I sat ionless, and looked at him steadily. He gave a shriek, fell senseless on the floor.

I left him there. There is one fact in connection with my of which you have not been hitherto aware. The exigenof my profession render it needful that I should at any mot be prepared to assume a different character. It is comto the ordinary detective. We of Chicto's league carry it
1 art, and practice it constantly. Even a slight change of
1 makes a striking alteration in a man's appearance, but a
plete disguise cannot be effected without one has the power
nk one's own identity and act a character, delineating every
e and phase of it."

A power that you certainly possess."

"It is partly acquired, though it must be mainly a gift. I have it, however, to this extent. While I have been known at the Falcon's Nest as O'Neil, I have rented apartments at the Lockstone Hotel as Hewbert, the artist. I have been there once or twice only, but sufficiently often for my purpose to establish a distinct identity.

"So I went there after I left Uxley's house, and stopped at a running brooklet on the way to cleanse my face, and when I entered the Lockstone Hotel I so concealed my features as not to be observed by the porter. I went to bed, rose early, made the requisite change of character, paid for my apartments, which I want no longer, and strolled down to Scofield's house, where I had breakfast. I had taken nothing but a glass of sherry and a few small biscuits at Lockstone, but I could not control my appetite at the Charnett inn. That is how I escaped, Kendrake, and now I am ready to go out again to haunt the footsteps of the chevalier—to be Michael Ewrick's fat2."

"How you seem to hate him!"

"Seem!" said O'Neil, with a cold, inward laugh; I do hate Michael Ewrick, and I shall bring him to a miserable death. You have a secret, Kendrake—a mystery, in which the cause of your hatred is wrapped. I have a secret, too."

"As I thought," observed the keeper, "it is less the Sin Phantom haunting a criminal than an avenger."

"True," said O'Neil, "an avenger. Could each thought of mine be embodied, it would be a terrible death to him. I seem vindictive beyond human reason, but when—as some day you shall—you know wherefore, you will not marvel at me. Tell me what has been done since I went to Uxley's house."

"The child-"

"I know. She shall be my first care."

"Doctor Hamilton has gone to London to see the family solicitors."

"Michael has gone with the same purpose, and Uxley follows him to-morrow. So much for what I heard while in peril.

And here we part, for my work lies far hence; yours is at home, to guard the Lady Leonora—the next blow will be aimed at her."

"The next blow-what?"

"Watch and wait; in what shape it may come I do not know yet, but be on the alert. Leave the child to me. I shall make it my especial care to keep her safely till she can be restored."
"You have a clew?"

"I have. I follow it to-day, and you shall hear from me before to-morrow night. So now adieu, John Kendrake, and remember, be secret as the grave concerning my return to life, and never forget that I am with you in the work of retribution."

He went from the lodge and up the village lane, leaving the forest-keeper to wonder more and more at his inscrutable friend.

Doctor Hamilton had promised to return before the expiration of the week, and there were but two days left; the doctor could see toward what point the sinister events were tending— Lord Sydney and the earl dead, the child lost, there was not much between the rich estate and its coveter.

Taking so deep an interest in the Charnetts, Hamilton lent his best energies and intellect to their service, and his brain was busy during the journey to the metropolis. He was very well acquainted with the secrets of the family.

The doctor, though an intellectual man, had an almost superstitious belief in the prophecy, "Son against sire, sire against son; brother against brother, and kindred against kindred, till the race shall be extinct." The words were the words of a malediction hurled at their ancestor in the feudal days by a dying Saxon peasant, whose home the ruthless Norman had outraged. He was but a poor swineherd, but the prophecy clung, and proved a withering curse, and the race was what was written on its crest—"Destined."

And it struck the doctor strangely as he remembered it. That malediction was spoken by a Kendrake, for the forest-keeper's

forefathers were tillers of the Charnett soil long before William, the Norman came to civilize and command; and singularly it fell out that in the last generation Earl Robert's only son was nurtured by Kendrake's mother, because the poor, pale Lady of Charnett had only strength to give a child to her husband and then die.

So the sturdy peasant-child and the peer's fragile nestling were suckled like brothers, and grew brother-like in heart despite the wide social gulf between them; and the peasant-child, now a stalwart man, was guardian to the last Lord of Charnett's widow and child. The inscrutable hand of destiny had worked such changes.

On these things Hamilton pondered as he walked through the busy streets of the metropolis, and made his way to Ludgate.

A noontide sun threw the shadow of the metropolitan cathedral on the crowded pave when the doctor stood at the solicitors' door.

The managing clerk, a man of middle age, on whose hard face much study of legal business had written some curious lines, sat in the outer office intently occupied with a pile of documents, and several juniors were at work under his direction. Doctor Hamilton was, apparently, expected, for immediately upon presentation of his card the senior clerk went respectfully to the inner room.

Hamilton had not to wait long, though Mr. Pentland was engaged. He cut the interview short with the client who had up to this moment occupied his time.

The doctor saw this client as he emerged, and recognized him instantly—it was the Chevalier de Buradoc.

The doctor did not notice him. He felt the quick, silent thrill that is experienced when the instincts recognize a foe.

"They have taken the initiative, then," Hamilton said mentally, thinking of the chevalier and Uxley. "I am not sorry, for we shall know what to expect." Mr. Pentland met him cordially, and with a grave smile.

He was a fine-looking gentleman, just past the meridian of life, but in the full vigor of intellect. He had a splendid head, with a scholar-like, reflective brow, and his manner was singularly collected. He took rank with the foremost men of his day.

The doctor was surprised to find how completely all he had to tell was anticipated. Pentland knew every incident in detail.

"We have not been idle," he said, in answer to Hamilton's inquiry as to whence his minute information was derived; and I should have been in Charnett before this, had not the case needed my presence here. You saw and recognized my new client?"

"The Chevalier de Buradoc."

The shadow of a smile played round Mr. Pentland's mouth.

"The Chevalier de Buradoc. I have seen a large variety of characters, but never hitherto met one who gave me so much trouble."

"You found him difficult to understand?"

"I did; but I shall sound him to his depths when he comes again. It appears that he is a very intimate friend of Colonel Ewrick's son—or reputed son—Michael."

"So he informed us at the inquest," said Doctor Hamilton.

"And it was on Michael Ewrick's behalf he came to me. They have commenced the action, and are good strategists. The chevalier delicately suggested that the Lady Leonora was never Lord Sydney's wife, and that the child is therefore illegitimate."

The doctor rose with an indignant exclamation.

"I confess it startled me," said Pentland, calmly, "but I have heard suggestions as preposterous and as false urged in open court, and legalized into truth. It was my purpose to listen to him, to see what position he was prepared to occupy."

"I met him at the outset with a question," continued Pentland, for Hamilton could only lend ear to what he heard. "I

said, Lord Sydney was disinherited because of his marriage with the lady."

"'Pardon me,' said the chevalier, and the chevalier is a very graceful, impressive gentleman, Hamilton, 'pardon me,' he said; 'Earl Robert disowned his son because his connection with the lady was a shameful *liaison*—a disgrace to the family."

"Had I been here," said the doctor, "I should have rammed the infamous lie down his throat." Pentland shook his head.

"Force is no argument," he said; "energy is better in the brain than in the hand. I asked him if he were sure, and he replied, emphatically, in the affirmative."

"But," began the doctor, "they were married in-in-"

"Ay, when and where? Though the very thought of doubt is an outrage, the fact must be proved. It is simply done. The production of the certificate, which of course her ladyship has, will settle the question and stop farther proceedings. So much for that. Now, in the next place, Michael Ewrick's very particular friend, the chevalier, hinted at illegality concerning the deed by which Ewrick Lois, Earl of Charnett, conveyed the title and estate to Lord Robert."

"There surely can be no dispute."

"A plea of any nature, and whether tenable or not, may be preferred at law, but in this case it would be a costly and useless proceeding, though it would give us much trouble. Family warfare is the worst of warfare, and should Michael attempt to sustain his plea, a most intricate investigation would ensue. We should have to search deep into the Charnett archives, and lay many an evil page of history bare."

"You have the documents?"

"Safely." The lawyer pointed to a massive iron safe let in the wall. "They are in that, and the only key to it is kept by me."

"A deed so executed could not be set aside."

"Except by fraud. No! but of all the witnesses, you and Mr. Uxley are the only survivors—the principals are dead."

"Then there is danger," mused the doctor, with a vague misgiving; "a subtle game is being played against us."

"I see there is; and we must wait for the next step from the enemy. I had an intimation from the chevalier to-day that he will attend again to-morrow in company with Mr. Uxley, from whom I have already received a communication. I have had them watched closely, but they have made a silent move or two that I cannot see yet. It is best to have our interview with Uxley and the chevalier as soon as possible. I have to send a message to the chevalier's hotel to appoint the hour."

"Let it be early; her ladyship will expect you to return with me on Saturday."

"I intend to do so. You had better stay with me till we go to Charnett."

"Thanks; but I am at Mivarts'."

"Better with me; yours is a valuable life, Hamilton, and it might be lost more easily than you think in this great throbbing city."

"Surely you do not think I am in danger?"

"I simply invite an old friend to stay a day or two with me," said Pentland, "and he knowing the value of my time should not waste it by putting irrelevant questions."

He touched a bell; one of the juniors entered.

"Jordan," he said, while writing a few words, "take this to the Chevalier de Buradoc, at Keyser's Hotel; there is no answer."

The clerk waited while his employer copied the letter in his private press, and while he waited the doctor surveyed him with a glance of passing interest. He was a handsome young fellow, gentlemanly, and distinguished beyond his position.

"Is he an ordinary clerk?" Hamilton asked, when the youth had gone.

"A very ordinary clerk," replied Pentland, dryly, "he has a soul above his avocation, and thinks more of billiards and the turf than of his work. But he does his duty, and his father

does not care to check his extravagance; it is sowing his wild oats, he says; I think they produce an unprofitable crop; I have a preference for good cultivated grain."

"Why keep him, if you doubt him?"

"He can do no harm while at work. Were I to dismiss him he would be thrown upon his own resources, and at his age the direct road to dissipation lies through idleness; besides, he will reform after he has singed his fingers a few times."

They left the office. As they went down Ludgate Hill a hansom cab drove slowly past, and a face peered out from behind a curtain partly drawn from the side window; it was there for a moment only, but Pentland saw it.

"I was right," he said.

"In what?"

"Taking care of you; the chevalier is watching you; he went past in that cab, and with him one of the worst swell sharpers in the metropolis. The fellow would pick a quarrel with you in the street, have you hustled and maltreated by a gang of confederates, and before assistance could come, you would be plundered and half-murdered. See!"

A look in the direction indicated by Pentland's glance satisfied Hamilton that he had not been cautioned in vain. The cab stopped at the corner of Farringdon street, and the chevalier's companion alighted. He strode leisurely back toward St. Paul's. The world might have contained nothing but himself and his cigar for all the interest he appeared to take in it.

"He has you pictured like a photograph," said Pentland, "and would know you anywhere. Note him well."

"I do."

The man he noted was a heavily-dressed, well-built fellow, with a not unhandsome face, but to an experienced eye it bore the impress of that cool, acquired, evil hardihood peculiar to the trained London birds of prey.

"Sleuth for sleuth!" Pentland said. "They have set Wolf Blake to watch you; I shall set a gentleman on the watch for him. We begin to see the game, Hamilton, and I must manage a checkmate."

He hailed a cab, and instructed the driver to make for Parliament street, and stop at Scotland Yard.

The two gentlemen got in. The cab made rapid progress through the city. The driver must have measured the space required for his wheels with mathematical precision, and in the had half an inch to spare on either side he went along as though it were plenty, and the pace no risk.

Wolf Blake was on the alert. Pentland had not made a mistake.

No sooner did the swell sharper see the lawyer and his companion hail the hansom than he called another, and said:

"Follow that cab-No. 721."

The driver touched his hat. He not unfrequently had such commissions, and he found them profitable as a rule. But he had not measured with quite such mathematical precision as had his brother driver the space required for his wheels. At the bottom of the hill he formed the center of a skillfully contrived jam. He lost the run through between a railway van and a three-horse omnibus by less than half an inch, not an atom more, but it just sufficed to set him inextricably as the central wedge in a block which kept together with admirable solidity for twenty minutes.

Wolf Blake bit his lip till the blood started. He had missed his quarry at the outset, but he felt that he was sure to hunt it down.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SLEUTH FOR SLEUTH.

The business that took Mr. Pentland to Scotland Yard did not detain him long. He solicited and obtained an immediate interview with the acting superintendent, by whom he was well known, and that individual received him with more than wonted courtesy. The astute, unbending man of law had powerful influence with the authorities, and when he had occasion to honor the yard with a visit, he was treated with due respect.

"I want Rodwin Duke," he said, declining a seat in the officer's comfortable room. "Can he come to me this evening?"

The superintendent cogitated.

- "He is on a particular matter now, Mr. Pentland. Would Griffiths do?"
- "No," said Pentland, decidedly. "Duke is the only man I could trust with this affair."
 - "Is it serious, sir?"
 - "A gentleman's life is in danger, Mr. Butler."
- Mr. Superintendent Butler did not look astonished. Such a thing as a gentleman's life had not only been in danger, but lost within a mile of the protective headquarters.
- "If there is any difficulty," said Pentland, "I will apply to Sir Richard Mayne."
- "No need, sir, no need," said Butler. "We know that whenever you say a thing must be, it is right. What time shall he come?"
 - "Seven."
- "Very well, Mr. Pentland; at seven he shall be there. Griffiths must exchange for him."

Pentland thanked the officer and retired.

"At seven," he said, as he rejoined Hamilton. "We may

reckon the insurance signed, old friend, and Wolf Blake will have an invisible chain set to his heel."

- "An insurance?"
- "A life insurance—yours. I have picked my sleuth, and I think he will be equal to the chevalier's. There are curious bits of hidden warfare that go on round us every hour, unseen incidents in the great play of life, in which the principal actors—men whose existences are linked together—are very often strangers to the last. The chevalier's kindly interest in you may bring Blake into mischief. Wolf Blake is the sleuth he has chosen."
 - "And yours?"
- "Is Rodwin Duke, a detective, who has as keen a scent for his prey as a blood-hound has for a fugitive. He is a character altogether much above the type of his brotherhood; and one feature that will be of utility in the present instance is that he has a deeply-rooted antipathy to Blake. A dangerous fellow that; and the chevalier must have known him on the Continent, for he is too wary of strangers to have been picked up so soon in London."
 - "Why should you think me in such imminent peril?"
- "You are one of the witnesses to the deed that stands in the way of Michael Ewrick's claim, and the Chevalier de Buradoc is a very intimate friend of his."
- "But while the deed itself exists, no benefit would accrue from an injury to me."
- "The signing must be proved. There is such a thing as forgery, and men of the stamp we have to deal with would not hesitate at charging it against your signature."
- "What was this Rodwin Duke?" the doctor asked, on their way to Pentland's handsome residence at Kensington.
- "The son of a gentleman originally, a brilliant scholar, and a profligate, then a man about town living on his wits—and he does not lack them. He was educated for the law, but failing to get practice as a barrister, he took to the more active part or

criminal-hunting. He has a gift for it. I am certain that by the very subtlety of his instinct he could pick an unknown, unsuspected malefactor out of a crowd."

Hamilton felt strongly interested in the man who was to be his protector.

The curiosity aroused was gratified, for punctually at seven Rodwin Duke arrived.

The doctor's first impression was one of disappointment. He had expected to see a man whose countenance would express his character, show signs of much sagacity and strength; instead of which he saw a gentlemanly fellow of ordinary aspect, a fair specimen of the average swell, slender, well-shaped, and listless.

- "You have not forgotten Wolf Blake?" said Pentland, when he had introduced Rodwin to the doctor.
 - "No," the detective curtly answered.
- "I have reason to think that he means mischief to my friend here. You shall hear on what ground I found my supposition."

Duke inclined his head and listened attentively, while Pentland proceeded to relate the Ludgate Hill incident. When he had concluded, the detective glanced curiously at Hamilton.

"If the man who was with Blake in the cab," he said, "has any particular purpose in getting your friend out of the way, it will not be sufficient for me to simply play the watch-dog. Tell me the whole of the case, Mr. Pentland, and I shall be better able to judge what to do."

The lawyer hesitated. He did not wish to enter too fully into confidential details, but on reflection he decided that Rodwin Duke could be trusted. He was an honorable man, and never broke faith with his employers.

"It is scarcely necessary to impress upon you how entirely this is a confidential matter," Pentland said, "and, premising that it is thoroughly understood, I may say, briefly, Doctor Hamilton is an important witness in an interesting case now pending, and the other side will not be scrupulous as to the manner of gaining their own ends."

- "What is the name of the gentleman Blake was with?"
- "The Chevalier de Buradoc."
- "Who was in some way associated with the murder at Charnett," said Duke, "as was this gentleman, Mr. Hamilton. I should like to have been put on that case."
 - "Why?"
- "It has peculiar features—such as I especially like to study; and I know that the men who have gone down about it will come back as wise as they went. The Chevalier de Buradoc has not been in London long?"
 - "No; he arrived this morning."
- "I cannot imagine how he came so soon," said Hamilton, "for he was in Charnett when I left, and there was no train till night."
- "The midday train is slow," said Duke. "The night is an express, and leaves the Midland line at the new junction; thence it comes direct, while the other goes the circuit of the agricultural districts."
- "I see. It was an oversight on my part to travel by it. I was anxious to get here, and took the first train that started."
- "He must have followed you; and clearly his acquaintance with Wolf Blake dates further back than from this morning—they must have met before."
 - "I suggested the same idea," said Pentland.
- "And you were right. They knew each other on the Continent, I should think. Blake only returned about three weeks ago. Am I correct, Mr. Pentland, in conjecturing that my mission has connection with the Charnett case?"
- "Well, it has. Blake, in fact, may follow us down there, since my friend returns in a day or two, and I with him."
- "I should advise you to be careful, then, and have nothing about you, the loss of which would be of any serious conscipuence. I can see my way more clearly now, and do not

wish to penetrate any deeper into your business. You can leave Blake to me, and Doctor Hamilton may feel perfectly secure. Mr. Blake's most affectionate friend would not watch his movements with greater interest than I shall."

"That is what we want, Mr. Duke."

"Since we have gone so far into confidence," said the detective, "and as Blake is mixed up in the affair, it is my duty to give you a hint concerning Henry Jordan."

"My junior clerk?"

"The same. He and Wolf are intimate. The lad has gone a fast game lately, and spent more money than his income affords. He is deeply in debt, too, and has a lot of harpies round him. Now, under press of circumstances, he may be induced to act in concert with your enemies; then you would have a traitor in the camp."

"That is a valuable caution, Mr. Duke. I thank you for it."

"I am watching him with interest. I should like to get him out of their hands, if possible; but he is willful and haughty; he shuns advice, and is going headlong to ruin. I should be sorry to do him any injury with you; but as there seems reason to fear the chevalier and Wolf, there is reason to fear their influence on the youth."

"This almost determines me to dismiss him at once," said Mr. Pentland, "and so save him from disgrace, perhaps. We will talk with him, however. I respect his father, and should be sorry to see Henry come to harm. It would, I suppose, be useless to ask what course of action you intend to pursue concerning Blake?"

"Quite. My course will be taken according to exigencies. I shall be at Wolf's elbow before the night is over, and shall not lose sight of him again. One thing, Dr. Hamilton, do not seem to recognize me, no matter when or where we meet."

The doctor promised, and Rodwin Duke departed. Sleuth

Before noon the next day the chevalier and Reuben Uxley waited on Mr. Pentland at his office. That gentleman was prepared for them.

"I hardly expected the honor of a visit from Mr. Uxley," Pentland observed, as he indicated a seat.

The chevalier had already taken one, and was watching the two legal gentlemen with an interest which was not unblended with amusement.

Both were clever men in their profession. Uxley would have made a fortune in London. He would have found plenty of scope for his peculiar talent. A deal of legal practice is required by rascaldom, and the Charnett lawyer's natural gifts were of the sort so much needed.

Reuben was on his guard. All his astute qualities were in play, and he was careful not to betray himself by the slightest inadvertence.

"I come in the interests of my client, Lord Michael, son of Earl Ewrick Lois, of Charnett," he said, deliberately, "and, in fulfilling the mission with which I am charged, I wish to act with every courtesy toward the unfortunate lady, the reputed wife of the Honorable Sydney Lois."

In spite of Mr. Pentland's habitual self-possession, he felt his cheek tingle at the other's cool, insolent audacity.

"The reputed wife of the Honorable Sydney Lois," he repeated, steadily. "In which terms I suppose you allude to the Lady Leonora, Lord Sydney's wife."

The Charnett lawyer bowed in the affirmative.

"Proceed, Mr. Uxley; let me understand your mission thoroughly."

"It is simple, Mr. Pentland. I, on behalf of Lord Ewrick, lay claim to the Charnett estate, declaring the said Lord Michael to be the legitimate and rightful heir."

"Forgetting the fact," said Mr. Pentland, "that even were the person you name legitimate, there is a special deed of gift, a covenant by which, in consideration of certain moneys and

circumstances, the right and title to the domain of Charnett are ceded by Ewrick to Robert Lois."

- "I declare such deed, if existing, to be invalid."
- "Yet you were a party to it, drew, and witnessed it."
- "That I totally deny. No such deed could have been legally executed, since the right of succession is unalterable."
 - Mr. Pentland manifested no surprise.
- "And you deny that a marriage ever took place between Lord Sydney and the Lady Leonora?"
- "Entirely. That a liaison, and only a liaison, existed, is well known. Sydney Lois, who held his title by courtesy only, never acknowledged her. That can be proved."
 - "By whom?"
- "The chevalier and others. The chevalier was intimately acquainted with the lady when she was on the lyric stage, and before and after Sydney became her protector. It is well known he was disinherited in consequence of his folly."
- "Earl Robert, when on his death-bed, reinstated Sydney, acknowledged his son's wife, and died forgiving him."
- "An absurd statement, which cannot be proved. The will made in favor of the next of kin still exists; there is, in fact, no other. I am instructed also to say that no shape of legal marriage between Sydney Lois and Leonora St. Durys can be proved, and there is no basis for an opposition to my client's claim."
- "That is not for us to decide. I shall certainly oppose such claim to the fullest extent of the resources at my disposal, and I advise you, Mr. Uxley, for your client's sake, not to court inquiry."
- "My friend Michael," said the chevalier, with a gleam of his white teeth, "is prepared to meet it, should there be occasion; but he would rather, for the sake of a noble family, keep its darker history from the world; and for the sake of the lady whom his Cousin Sydney wronged so deeply—though he laved

her—he would rather act generously and delicately with her, making handsome provision for her and for her child."

"Chevalier de Buradoc," said Pentland, "let me advise you, for the sake of your friend, not to move too far in this matter. I am prepared with overwhelming testimony to contest and crush out his claim. I am also prepared fully to establish the right of the Lady Leonora Lois to act as guardian to her husband's legitimate child until that child shall be of age to inherit."

"What testimony, Mr. Pentland?"

"This, chevalier. The position of your friend Michael is one of the most painful and difficult imaginable. His reputed father, Lord Ewrick, has left a document in which he entirely repudiates him. There was a prior marriage with the younger brother Cecil, and the lady, Miss Brewer formerly, was in the condition of maternity before she was the victim of an outrage which Lord Ewrick admits having perpetrated. The child Michael was born within six months of her compelled union with the colonel."

"Ah, my mother!" thought the chevalier, with a bitter sigh; "her destroyer's hatred shakes me even from the grave."

"Who keeps this document, Mr. Pentland?" he asked.

"I have it, with others that the late earl left. The Lady Leonora has thought fit to honor me with her confidence, and her adviser, Dr. Hamilton, has placed all the important papers in my care."

Michael and his accomplice both felt that Pentland held them in powerful check while such a document existed. They had never heard of it before.

Michael cursed him mentally; the battle seemed more difficult to fight.

"What," he asked, rising, "would be the consequence if Michael were to enforce his claim, and take possession of Charnett House?"

"I should have him expelled by writ of ejectment," said Pentland, quietly. "That is, providing that he were really in possession; it he were not, I should prepare for the attempt."

"It would be a serious matter. Any one in the house—say John Kendrake, Lord Sydney's foster-brother—could take upon himself to defend her ladyship's property; and if your friend Michael were shot or otherwise slain, the verdict against his slayer would be justifiable homicide. Such a verdict, in such a case as we have supposed, met the approbation of a celebrated judge, a great judicial thinker, and a very learned authority."

Reuben Uxley winced. It was a decision he did not admire.

"We may expect, then, to have the case contested?" he said.

"You may rely upon it, Mr. Uxley. Your client and his supporters generally will have to sustain a very damaging course of inquiry. The result may involve something more than a judicial defeat."

This sounded like a threat, though Mr. Pentland's voice and manner were courteous to a degree.

Uxley was not the less uneasy. People who knew the Ludgate lawyer well were aware that he was never more dangerous than when he was politely careless in the advice he gave to an opponent.

"We will try the question, Mr. Pentland," Reuben said. "
"My client feels that his cause is just."

Mr. Pentland bowed.

"Very well, Mr. Uxley."

"My client wished the chevalier to see the lady, and suggest to her a course that will avoid much pain."

"If I might suggest a course to him," said Pentland, dryly, "I should advise him to avoid the house. The best intentions are sometimes misconstrued, and there is a possibility that the lady would treat his suggestions as insolence, and call the services of her groom into requisition. I can set the matter before her in its true light. I go to Charnett to-morrow, and after conferring with her ladyship I shall do myself the honor of visiting you."

Uxley bowed low and backed toward the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Pentland."

"Good-morning."

The Ludgate lawyer exchanged a very formal parting courtesy with the chevalier, and a faint smile was on his lip as his visitors retired.

The interview had not satisfied them.

"Curse him!" said Michael, when they were in the street.
"That is just the man to baffle us. He weighed his chances while he spoke and arranged his plans while listening. He never moved a muscle at what would have astounded most men."

"He is a man of peculiar experience," said Uxley, "and a London lawyer is not easily surprised. Who was that young man with whom you exchanged so significant a glance as you left the outer office?"

"Henry Jordan, an acquaintance, who may be useful. I like to provide against contingencies, and it is well to have a friend in the enemy's stronghold. We shall see the young gentleman at dinner."

Michael had not reckoned without reason on the assistance of Pentland's junior clerk. The unfortunate youth was too deeply in the power of Wolf Blake, the sharper, to offer resistance when the nefarious plan was suggested to him. The accomplished sharper knew his victim thoroughly.

He sat like the tempter at his side, while the young man, dazzled by the supposed rank of his entertainer, drank every time the wine was passed. He made him drunk, and then drew from him all he wished to know—how the office-doors were fastened, where the safe was placed, and what kind of locks defended it. The information thus acquired was sufficient for Blake. He promised that the safe should be ransacked, and its contents in the chevalier's possession before the dawn came.

And his promise was fulfilled. Blake set a trio of experienced

housebreakers to work; and the city police were either skillfully hoodwinked or willfully blind, for the thieves were not disturbed.

The burglary took place two hours after midnight, and at eight in the morning Wolf went to the chevalier with the whole of the documents he wanted—the late earl's private papers, Lord Ewrick's terrible communication, that stamped Michael illegitimate; the deeds of mortgage, the conveyance of title and estate—all were there complete.

The robbery was planned and perpetrated with such consummate care that no suspicion was awakened. The doors and the safe were refastened, and left exactly as before; packets of old parchment were prepared to perfectly resemble, and were put in place of, those abstracted.

No discovery was made till Pentland himself looked through the Charnett deeds, ere he started with the doctor on their journey. Then he saw at once what had been done.

A face blanker with dismay than that which Pentland turned toward him, Hamilton had never seen.

"We fight with demons," the lawyer said. "Human scoundrelism, mental subtlety, could not go so tar. We must make for Charnett, doctor, and at once, or I have a doubt that even there they will do more mischief than we can hope to combat."

Rodwin Duke entered while Pentland was still examining what seemed so great a mystery, for not a lock or bolt showed a trace of tampering.

"They were too much for us," he said to his employer. "They were too quick for me, but I have not quite lost the game."

Pentland smiled bitterly in doubt.

"You think I have done less than was in my power," said the detective, without evincing anger or reproach; "and you are welcome to believe so if I do not prove otherwise."

[&]quot;Too late, Duke-the cause is ruined."

"Wait, and take this bit of consolation with you. Wolf Blake is not a jackal, to feed a lion's wants, and be content with a jackal's share. That safe was stripped at two this morning; its contents did not reach the chevalier till eight. What do you think took place in the meantime?"

"Tell me, there is no time for conjecture."

"Why, Blake had every line and word in every paper copied in fac simile; the seals and stamps were forged by a masterly adept."

"Well?"

"The chevalier has the copies—Wolf keeps the originals; and I will stake my reputation that I get them from him by the time you return."

"Do that," said Pentland, earnestly, "and I shall not think any price you name too much in reward."

He started for Charnett with the doctor. The dark contest of strategy was growing desperate, but Pentland was beginning to know the man he had to cope with.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DESOLATE HOUSE.

In spite of the heavy blow dealt to his hopes by the robbery of the Charnett deeds, Mr. Pentland did not lose faith in his power to successfully combat the machinations of Leonora's dangerous enemy.

There were no other passengers in the compartment in which he and Hamilton were seated, so they could speak without fear of being overheard.

"What a piece of consummate rascality," said Hamilton, "in the lesser scoundrel, to defraud his master by giving him copies instead of originals. The idea is hardly credible. What can be Blake's purpose?" "It is so palpable that I wonder the chevalier gave him a chance of carrying it into execution. These documents are only useful to him in the event of Michael's success. The master of Charnett would then be completely at the mercy of a London adventurer, a man who could at any time have the usurper ejected."

"He could get some silence money for his secret."

"He would be more likely to get silenced," said Pentland, "for our opponents do not seem scrupulous as to trifles."

"You made no outcry about the burglary?"

"In which I was wise. What could I have done? Told the police, and had half a dozen thick-headed, inefficient blunderers sent after some of the cleverest rogues in the metropolis? No, doctor, in a matter like the present, the police are the last I would consult. Had I stated my suspicion to the authorities, and caused the arrest of Blake, I should have found it very difficult to supply sufficient reason for his detention. Besides, the silent way is the surest; it keeps the criminal in fear, for while he knows steps are being taken against him, he does not know from what quarter to expect hostility, and when it comes, it finds him unprepared."

The lawyer and his friend were not the only passengers who stopped at Lockstone for Charnett. They saw Reuben Uxley leave the station and walk rapidly homeward. He was alone. The chevalier had evidently remained behind.

That circumstance set Pentland thinking, and his thought was momentarily diverted by another. Wolf Blake—Pentland knew him at a glance, in spite of some alteration in his appearance—entered the Lockstone Hotel, and a stranger, one the lawyer did not recognize yet, climbed to the box-seat of Scofield's coach.

Only as he made himself comfortable with a rug over his knees, he turned his head and fixed a peculiar look on Pentland. That gentleman knew him instantly then. It was Rodwin Duke.

The sleuth had not lost the scent.

Pentland made no remark to Hamilton. He had sounded the latter's character, and did not find it overweighted with discretion. The Ludgate lawyer hired a fly, and with his companion was driven to Charnett House.

He was glad that the detective had followed. Keen and foreseeing as he was, with his natural astuteness sharpened by the constant contact of the astutest people in the world, he saw the danger threatened by the London sharper's advent. It was no groundless fear which had impelled him to put the doctor under Duke's protection.

Hamilton was an important part of the case. His absence in the event of the documents not being regained, would have made a great difference.

Pentland's expectation was aroused by the anticipation of the forthcoming interview. He had never seen the lady of whom he heard so much by repute. He was interested, too, in the meeting with John Kendrake.

The doctor found Leonora better. Despair had vanished before the advance of steadfast faith, and she hoped each hour to see Alice again. Hamilton found her calm and composed, and quite prepared to see the solicitor from London.

Mr. Pentland's anticipation was more than realized. He did not wonder, when he saw the lady, that the youthful Lord of Charnett had risked a grand inheritance for her sake, and had he for a moment entertained belief in the chevalier's shameful lie, it would have faded at the first glance. There was nothing less than the pure pride of stainless womanhood on Leonora's regal brow.

The Lady Charnett welcomed him with a sad smile.

"My husband spoke of you as a true and honorable gentleman," she said; "and in this, the hour of my trouble, I am glad to see you here."

The solicitor pressed his lips respectfully to her small, olive

"If I have not come before," he said, "it has not been for want of interest in your trouble, Countess Lois. You have no more devoted servant than I shall prove. I am wanted here now; there is a threat of danger nearer home."

"I know," she said, composedly. "I received a letter this morning from Mr. Uxley, who purports to be acting for some one calling himself Lord Michael Ewrick Lois."

"Have you heard of him?"

"My husband mentioned him in terms of pity, and it was his intention to act generously toward him. But I think the man Uxley has seen you."

"Yes; he came in company with his friend, a client's friend, the chevalier."

"Ay, De Buradoc, a man who haunts me like an evil genius. I knew him in France, Mr. Pentland, in Paris, when Sydney and I were happy with our little one, and he hated Sydney then—I could see it when he smiled; but you have seen him, and so you know; and I am spared the repetition of the bitter falsehood his hireling has written."

"Has he dared?" said Pentland.

"See !" and she handed him a crumpled letter.

It contained the substance of what Uxley had said to Pentland in London, the grounds on which Michael based his claim, and how he repudiated hers.

"It wants but little proot to crush this insolent lie," said Pentland; "should they bring the question into open court, the certificate of marriage, countess, the name of the minister who performed it, and the names of the witnesses."

"The certificate!" said Leonora; and then for the first time it struck her that she had not seen it since the evening of Sydney's death. Trouble had followed so rapidly on trouble that she had not given it a thought, never dreaming that she would have need to produce it in defense of her honor.

"You have it, of course?" said Pentland.

"It was in Sydney's pocket-book," she said, "and they who

searched when he was brought home must have put it somewhere—in the bureau, perhaps, with his father's papers."

Leonora went to look for it, and the lawyer waited the result with an uneasy feeling.

He was not greatly surprised when Leonora returned to say the pocket-book was missing. He asked her to try and recollect if she had seen it since her arrival in England, or while her husband's body was being searched, but the one great sadness had engrossed her whole attention, and she remembered nothing else.

Doctor Hamilton and Kendrake had searched the latter's foster-brother.

Pentland, upon questioning them, was startled to find how things of great importance may be entirely overlooked.

"I saw it at the lodge," said the forest-keeper, "but I did not think of it afterward, though I have wondered lately whether her ladyship had it."

Pentland bit his lips in deep perplexity.

"At the lodge," he repeated; "did his lordship show it to you?"

"Asked me to take care of it, for the presentiment was upon him then. He told me to keep it for the sake of those he loved, but I said they would not need a guardian yet, and pressed it back upon him."

"And you did not find it when-"

"When he was brought home dead? No, I did not give it a thought."

"I am very sorry," said the lawyer, gravely, "but the evil is not, I hope, irremediable. Her ladyship must tell me every particular. I must request the favor of a few words with you also, Mr. Kendrake. The danger increases and we must work."

The keeper inclined his stately head. The other looked a doubt that his words did not express.

"It is lost," Pentland said, when he returned to Leonora;

"the assassin must have stolen it. The motive for that brutal deed becomes more apparent now. Tell me, dear lady, and be calm, where you were married, by whom, and who were witnesses?"

"In Versailles," said Leonora, rapidly. "Surely it will not be denied?"

"It must be proved."

"What! Doubt my husband—outrage his honor by an insult to his wife? Can such things be done?"

"We have proved too sadly what can be done to question what our enemies may attempt. Who was the minister?"

"An aged Frenchman-Pierre Legard. But he is dead."

"Dead! It is like fate warring against the innocent. The witnesses?"

"One was the chapel-keeper—Mere Mignon she was called; the other, a French gentleman—an exile now—by name Baptiste Jaconet."

"Pierre Legard, dead," wrote Pentland in his note-book. "Mere Mignon, chapel-keeper, and Baptiste Jaconet, now in exile. We must find those two, and obtain a duplicate of the register. There is still hope, though this will give us trouble. Now tell me, dear lady, and I shall ask no more questions that will pain you, where is the will that your husband's father gave you on his death-bed? Hamilton can swear to that, though the earl did not live to alter the codicil."

"The will?"

Leonora's face lit with a smile as, turning from the lawyer for a moment, she bared her breast and drew the silken bag from its resting-place.

"Here, Mr. Pentland; it has lain next my heart since the night my husband died—the token of a parent's forgiveness, a father's love."

Pentland unfolded it eagerly; his countenance, hopeful as he began to read, underwent rapid changes before he had pro-

ceeded far, and at last he stopped with an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Leonora, troubled by his look.

"Heavens!" said Pentland, "has some necromancer been at work? Were you deceived, or did you not look at this before you took it to keep there?"

The lady's fice whitenel as he grew agitated.

"I read every line, and kissed the writing hallowed by his father's hand. What is there wrong?"

"Wrong! This is the will that disinherits Sydney and gives Charnett to his next of kin. In this Earl Robert repudiates you, and implies the lie old Uxley is prepared to swear. Countess of Lois, are we dreaming?"

She went to his side to scan the parchment through, and her senses seemed to blend in chaos as she read. She could not doubt—it was there visible to her sight—the instrument that worked out a father's curse—and the one that told his forgiveness was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LEONORA'S SUDDEN RESOLUTION.

Like a flash of light the truth came to Leonora.

"The man who came at night," she said, in strangly intense tones, "my husband's slayer, my child's abductor, and my dedestroyer now, he wrought this bitter mockery—and Kendrake spared him. Kendrake, poor Sydney's foster-brother, so loved, so trusted, and so true in seeming. What need have I of friends? of what use are they, since they could not save, and are powerless to avenge? Sydney and my child both dead to me, my honor broken, and I made to seem a thing of shame. It is the curse! the curse! It killed my husband and has blighted me!"

She fell prone upon the floor-not dead, not fainting, but

quite prostrate in despair; she moved not, made no sign, ex cept to beckon Pentland away.

He dared not interfere yet; her desperate sorrow awed him, and he stole softly out to send the doctor to her, and to see John Kendrake.

"Tell her there is hope in spite of all," the lawyer said to Hamilton; "that we have power to prove her right, contest the other's claim, avenge her husband, and restore her child, and she must not despair. It is much to promise," he said, despondently; "the evil work has been done with such infernal skill that my heart misgives me when I say there is hope."

The forest-keeper, who, since Pentland had first spoken to him, had been conversing with the doctor, knew what would be the topic of the interview, received the lawyer with grave, somber quietude; he was prepared to be doubted, to have his reticence misconstrued, and his very devotion suspected.

His purpose did not change—he never swerved from that; his destiny was so unlike the destiny of ordinary men that they could not judge his actions by their own.

So he listened while Pentland told him Leonora's last and gravest sorrow—how her fair fame was menaced, and how her foes had plotted to rob her child of the inheritance.

"And you know very much," Pentland said—"enough, perhaps, to change the aspect of affairs, bring the wronger to justice, and help to restore the child."

"To kill her," Kendrake said. "Believe me, Mr. Pentland, were I to say all I know, and all I think, it would not make an atom's difference, or bring the end nearer by an hour. Vengeance is sure, but the time is not yet come."

"We can't wait for it blindly, Mr. Kendrake; each minute lost or misspent in the wrong course endangers Lady Leonora's name and welfare. Think of it, how your foster-brother was slain, his child stolen, his widow outraged in her sleep."

The keeper's swarthy cheek flushed red.

"Think of it, you tell me!" he said; "as though I had ever forgotten it."

"Well, then, tell the truth. Out with the mystery, for you have one; or if you have a special reason for secrecy, give me a clew and I will fathom it. Why did you spare the man who robbed the countess of the will?"

"There was a dead face before my gun, I heard the echo of a dying prayer, and I remembered an oath. Would you ask more?"

"Where was the oath sworn to Lord Sydney?—was it forgotten?"

John Kendrake's broad chest heaved with pain.

"It haunted me as it does now, tortured me as does every word of doubt. Could he rise from his grave, he would exonerate me, I am sure."

Though Pentland was as much impressed as mystified by Kendrake's manner, he still persisted."

- "Who was the man you spared?"
- "He wore a mask."
- "But you saw his face?"
- "For a moment, yes-in the night gloom."
- "Was it the Chevalier de Buradoc?"
- "No," said the keeper, wishing from his soul he had not been forced to tell the evasive truth, since it was like helping Michael in his evil. "It was not the Chevalier de Buradoc."
 - "Did you recognize the man you saw?"
- "I should know him again, Mr. Pentland. And now I must decline to answer further."
 - "I am grieved to hear you say so, if such is your resolution,"
 - "It is unalterable."
- "Her ladyship spoke bitterly of you," said Pentland. "She said you spared your foster-brother's murderer, her child's abductor, and the man that outraged her. 'Kendrake,' she said, 'so loved, so trusted, and so true in seeming,' and she said it in bitterness."

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"Did she?" said Kendrake, very sadly. "Well, I must bear it till I prove my love; but it pains me."

He paced the chamber slowly and with bowed head.

Hamilton entered. Leonora had sent him for Pentland and the keeper.

Her beautiful face was pallid, her voice low, and its melody unbroken, as she said:

"I leave Charnett to-day for the sake of a proud name, and because I will not have my husband's honor sullied by a breath of suspicion. I shall contest the stranger's claim, or prove my own before a public tribunal. I go, and go alone, to seek my child, and Heaven will guide a mother's footsteps."

"Leave Charnett, and alone?" said Kendrake.

"Ay, my desolation is my own, and what solace Heaven may give me shall come to me in loneliness. There is a curse on the inheritance; but for the covetous greed it has created I should not be widowed and childless now. I want nothing but my little one, and surely I may find her."

Kendrake dropped to his knee.

"To go, and doubting me," he said, "were worse than death. I could not avert the misery that has come, and I would give my life to alleviate it."

"I utter no reproach, John Kendrake. I doubt nothing, I believe nothing; I weigh deeds, not words. I only know that Sydney is in his grave, and my child is gone, and that he who swore sacredly to be the avenger and savior will not unlock his tongue to tell the truth and help righteous retribution on its way. Come to me when Sydney is avenged; come to me when Alice rests once more on my heart; then, and not till then, will I say John Kendrake kept his oath."

"So be it," he said, rising with a great sorrow on his face; "and till that time shall come there is no rest or happiness for me. Until that time shall come I say farewell to Charnett."

He went with somber brow and mountful eye to Ishmael,

who was at his book. The forest-keeper closed it gently, and took the boy by the hand.

"Come, Ishmael," he said, with a quiver of emotion; "our place is no longer here—our home is not in Charnett. Will you come with me?"

"Whither?" asked the boy, wondering and instinctively clinging to Kendrake's hand.

"Into the world—a barren place, poor lad. Anywhere. The outcast has no choice, and fate must lead him to work out his dertiny."

"To leave Charnett? Does her ladyship wish it?"

"She has said it, Ishmael," and his chest heaved heavily, "she has said it."

"Then we will go," said the boy, springing to his feet, "I would not stop anywhere on charity. I can work."

"We are not poor, Ishmael, my wants were few and I had a generous master. Our forefathers had a little store of gold and each left a little more to his children. We have not poverty to fear."

"Are we going far?"

"To find Alice and the man who slew Lord Sydney."

"Then I shall take my gun," cried Ishmael, "and when we see him I will shoot him as I did the man in the mask."

"Hush," said Kendrake, with a sigh, "and come; there is nothing to stay for here,"

"My books."

"Leave them. I have to teach you other lessons henceforth. Terrible lessons," he added mentally, "but it is what I have sworn."

The sun was sinking when the forest-keeper and his sister's child left Charnett House behind them. They went to the old village church, and in the quiet place where the dead were sleeping Kendrake paused.

He looked wistfully at the vault under the church—Sydney

was there. He looked more wistfully at a plain gray slab engraven with his sister's name.

"Kneel with me," he said, "and kiss your mother's grave. We shall not see it again for many a year."

The boy knelt with tearful yearning and pressed his lips to the green turf.

Kendrake's eyes were dim.

"Poor Loo," he said, "poor Loo, that dying prayer of yours has brought me bitter sorrow, but I shall not forget it. My hand will not be raised against him, yet Sydney's death must be avenged. A Kendrake never broke an oath, and I have two both deeply sworn. I have to give him mercy, I have to bring upon him a red retribution—a strange and sorrowful destiny, but Heaven will help me to fulfill it."

And so he rose and went from Charnett, leading Ishmael by the hand. He took a last sad look at the quiet graveyard and the grand old hill. When they were out of sight he felt like an exile.

On the same night Leonora left her husband's ancestral home, and she went forth quite alone. Charnett was a place of gloom to her, a sepulcher of death and sorrow, where she had buried love. She went, and none knew whither.

The desolate house was closed next day. Mr. Pentland gave Leonora one solemn promise. He would guard her child's inheritance, and no stranger could set foot as master on the Charnett floor. It was a sorrowful comfort to her, but it was a comfort. It was something to have the deserted house kept sacred to the dead, until the living should come to gladden it again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GARRULOUS HOST.

The success of Gambert's Hippodrome at Drocburn was an established fact. The lion-tamer's exhibition and equestrian drama were sources of unabated attraction. The native population went again and again to marvel at the lion-tamer's fearlessness and to gaze with rapture on Corinne. They caused quite an influx of strangers, and the thriving midland town grew prosperous.

Mr. Bertram, of the King's Arms Hotel, had his share of patronage. Several high-class commercial travelers, who spent money freely, took up their abode with him; and there came a stranger to whom he took an especial liking, a fair-haired gentleman, with a pleasant face, and whose card was inscribed:

"Alfred Hewbert, R. A."

The hotel-keeper was in favor of gentlemen who were gentlemen, as he expressed it, and flattered himself he was a judge.

Mr. Alfred Hewbert answered his requirements fully.

On the evening of his arrival, Mr. Hewbert solicited the honor of the hotel-keeper's company over a bottle of wine. He liked, as he said pleasantly, to be on good terms with his host, and his host was never disinclined to taste his own viands at a guest's expense, so they grew familiar. The artist was irresistibly winning, and Mr. Bertram naturally given to confidence.

"Hotel keeping is an art," said Hewbert, with a frank smile, "and it is an independent sort of life. One acquires an insight into character by following it, and learns to take men for what they are worth, irrespectively of grades. Besides, in a provincial hotel—and I may say yours is an excellent establishment, Mr. Bertram—"

Mr. Bertram's bow bordered on the salaam.

"In a provincial hotel, one does not expect to have a duke in the next suite and a countess over his head; in fact, that kind of peope are bores, with their stilted style and wintry courtesy. Meeting a dowager duchess on a strange staircase is equal to a cold bath, and to run accidentally against a frigid member of parliament is equivalent to a second plate of ice."

Mr. Bertram laughed respectfully.

"I do not object to commercial people in the dull season," he said, "but the character of a house must be maintained. The commercial interest is a great element, Mr. Bertram, a paying element, and it will not be put down by heraldry. Professional men are more precarious, perhaps. Genius is proverbially erratic, and sometimes cannot descend to the commonplace fact that sordid dross is needed for its physical support."

"Very true, sir. I object to professional gentlemen and ladies, too, as a rule. The exception is only in favor of well-known London stars, and then their bills are guaranteed by the manager. But Mr. Gambert pays like a prince, and he was a gentleman before he took to the stage."

"A fortunate thing for Mr. Gambert. It is hoped the influence of early teaching will cling to him. People do not generally cultivate a gentleman's quiet elegance and graceful good taste after taking to the stage. Mr. Gambert and the lady, I believe, are the only two professionals here at present?"

"The only two, sir. Is the wine to your palate?"

"A rare vintage—the 1805." Mr. Bertram gave its age within twenty years or so. "Mr. Gambert will have no other. He and the Count Dunault have nearly exhausted the bin."

"The Count Dunault? They are friends, then?"

"Acquaintances, sir." Mr. Bertram seemed rather sorry his affable guest had not a loftier title. "A sweet little girl the count has; not a bit like him, though."

[&]quot; Just."

[&]quot;Ah! Has he been here long?"

- "Three days now, sir. I had been expecting him a week, and did not think he would stay more than a night. The gentleman who came to arrange for him, the Chevalier——"
 - "A French gentleman, then?"
- "French, sir—the Chevalier de Buradoc. He said the count would not remain. He brought a reference from one of my most respected customers, the Baroness Southey, and gave me a check beforehand, or, being a foreigner, I should not have cared to incur the risk of engaging a suit of servants and provided a traveling carriage."
- "My friend, the chevalier, made a false step," thought the artist, with an inward smile, "when he left such a clew within forty miles of Charnett. The title is not unfamiliar to me," he said, aloud, and with a peculiar inflection.
 - "The chevalier, sir?"
 - "No, the Count Dunault."
 - "Does he know you, sir?"
- "I do not think he would remember me," and the artist added, with a curious smile, "half so well as I remember Cymon, Count Dunault."
 - "Would you like him to have your card, sir?"
- "No; I think if we meet accidentally, and he chooses to remember me, I shall not mind, but I never hunt up my titled friends. That was a very beautiful woman I saw going out as I came in."
 - "Mademoiselle Corinne. You should see her in Mazeppa."
- "I intend to have that pleasure. And so it was the Chevalier de Buradoc who made arrangements for his friend the count? He must have resided in the neighborhood."

The interrogation caused a reflective pause.

"I think not," the hotel-keeper said at length; "the count had been traveling, for he spoke of having had to take the last stage by rail. It was, I should imagine, the difficulty of getting proper equipage whenever he wanted it that suggested the idea of having one of his own."

"Possibly."

"And foreigners are curious in their ways; they do things an English gentleman would never dream of, and they are not particular about the charge. I asked no questions. I had the money beforehand."

"There speaks the wisdom of commerce," said Hewbert, with a laugh. "One sees and hears curious things at times. I had a chat with a mounted constable as I came along, and he was telling me about a horse they had found without a rider. It appears, too, that one of his comrades was knocked down and nearly killed three nights since."

Mr. Bertram said "Indeed," as though the information did not interest him deeply.

"I shall take a stroll through the town," the artist said, "and drop in at the hippodrome, I think. The evening performance commences at——"

"Seven; but there is nothing much till half-past."

"I suppose so, by the programme I glanced at; the introductory fun is usually dreary. It is now only half-past six, so I have time to dress."

He rose. Mr. Bertram took the hint and retired. The artist took a seat by the window and sat looking out into the town. His heavy temples were lowered in deep thought, his fingers pushed up the light brown hair from his forehead and rested on a scar. He wore a quiet smile.

"It will be something to see my own phantom," he soliloquized, "and embodied in such a man. I wonder how the chevalier would feel if he knew I were here under the same roof with his hireling? I shall save the child. I do not think the count's paternal love will trouble him greatly at the thought of parting with her when I supply him with such cogent reasons for believing with me, that she will be much better in my care than his."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

O'NEIL GATHERS INFORMATION.

Alfred Hewbert, R. A., made a leisurely toilet, and then ne had a few minutes to spare for a saunter and a cigar in 1-cultivated garden of the King's Arms. Madelen, the girl, was there with her master's supposed daughter, little

Hewbert watched her with affectionate interest. He er at the first glance, having seen her several times with I in Charnett. The child was at play now, laughing gleenile tossing a ball to and fro with Madelen, whose coquetce grew less abandoned and quieter as she saw a strange nan observing them.

our little charge seems very happy," the artist said, in, and his winning smile won a reply from the girl.

ry happy, m'sieu," she said, demurely.

bert took some bon-bons from his pocket and held them Alice, who advanced toward him shyly.

not be afraid, little one—come and kiss me."

child had not forgotten McDonald's caution, and hesi-

me," he said, taking her tiny hand, and stooping to ler; "we must make friends for mamma's sake."

imma!" The word touched her childish heart and reskeenest yearning for her parent. McDonald had quieted h promises that she should be taken home on the morth that morrow did not come.

1 you know my mamma?" she asked, wistfully, and for-Simon's caution on the instant.

s, and I know Mr. Kendrake and Ishmael. I have come you home again."

a says he will take me home; he tells me so every

night," Alice pouted; "but he remains with the lady instead."

"Who is papa?"

"The gentleman who brought me here."

"We shall put his paternal love to the test anon," said the artist, mentally, and, caressing the child again, he turned to Madelen, who had waited uneasily while the stranger and her charge were speaking. They had conversed mostly in English.

"You love this little one?" he said, in her native tengue.

"Dearly, m'sieu."

"It would pain you to part from her?"

"M'sieu!" and she snatched Alice to her breast.

The action satisfied her interrogator. He placed a sovereign in Madelen's palm.

"Then be discreet, and keep silent about my having noticed her. The child is attached to you, apparently, and her mother would perhaps gladly accept you as attendant."

"Her mother! Nay, m'sieu, the count has no wife."

"No," smiled the artist; "nor kith nor kin. M'sieu the count is hardly himself, in fact."

"M'sieu?"

He had muttered lowly, and Madelen did not understand him.

"Nothing, my good girl. You shall know more by and by, after I have seen m'sieu, the count."

He re-entered the hotel and went to the floor occupied by McDonald and Gambert. The artist had made himself acquainted with the exact locality of the pretended count's apartments. He walked in unannounced.

The room was empty. It was one of two, communicating, and screened in the center by handsome brocade curtains. In the chamber beyond these curtains he heard the sound of voices.

One was McDonald's, the other a woman's. Under any other circumstances the artist would have scorned to play the part of eavesdropper, but he was curious to see who was the poacher's fair companion.

It was in the dusk of twilight, and his footfall on the carret made no noise. He pushed the heavy tapestry aside and peered in. McDonald stood in a curtained window recess, and with him, leaning on his breast, her white arm round his neck, was Corinne.

McDonald was speaking in low, passionate tones, and the artist listened. They were not aware of his presence.

"Every hour now is a danger to me," Simon was saying; "for I may be tracked from Charnett, and then escape would be hopeless. Why not fly with me to-night, Corinne? Better now than later, when Gambert may begin to suspect."

"I tremble at the thought, Donald; it seems so great a sin."

"To love me," he said, reproachfully, "and leave a man for whom you do not care? Am I to go alone, never, never more to see you again?"

Corinne clung to him, trembling with emotion.

"I shall be hunted down, Corinne, unless I am soon far from England—away from my tempter, away from sin and peril. And we could forget the past—we should be happy."

"This explains his protracted stay," thought Hewbert.
"The power of passion keeps him here in spite of jeopardy.
What an infernal miscreant the man is—a traitor to his friend, tempting a woman who loves him far too well."

"To-night, while we have time," McDonald pleaded. "Gambert entertains his company at a stage supper, and will not return till hours past midnight. To avoid suspicion I will have our carriage prepared at once, and kept in waiting till the programme is over. Shall it be so, Corinne, or must we part?"

The thought of separation wrung from her a tearful, reluctant consent; and the fierce, unholy kiss Simon gave her made the artist shrink. He saw her danger; she was passion-blinded, and did not.

The tempter's soul was full of exultation. The beautiful equestrienne was his at last.

"Take the child with you" he said. "I will stay here this

evening to make preparation. I am only content to go now, Corinne—because I know it is for the last time."

Hewbert glided out as McDonald led Corinne to the door. Her brougham was in waiting. The artist, watching from the staircase-window, saw her enter it with Madelen and little Alice.

It drove away. Hewbert went back to the count's apartments.

That gentleman was considerably astonished by the advent of the fair-haired artist, who strode in without ceremony, and striking a wax match, lit the chandelier. The light fell full upon McDonald's face.

"I like to see my friends," said Hewbert, coolly. "I may say, I like to see myself. Don't rise and make a stranger of me, count—I am not one."

McDonald rose haughtily, though his heart misgave him.

"Sir, this is a most unwarranted intrusion."

"Be more hospitable, count, and sit down. You scarcely recognize me. We were old friends before you disappeared so suddenly eight years ago."

Simon felt a chill creep to his finger ends. Here, confronting him, he thought, was a man who had been acquainted with the gentleman whose character he was assuming.

"Eight years," he faltered, trying to appear at ease; "that is such a long period that I must be pardoned if I have forgotten you."

"Certainly. Let us recall old times, and remember each other, allowing me first to express my surprise at your resuscitation. You look none the worse for it, except in age. Eight years ago you were only three-and-twenty—you are seven-and-thirty now in appearance."

The creeping fear grew colder, and sank into Simon's breast. The artist had exactly named his real age.

"Trouble," he said, "changes a man."

"It does. Now let me see. On the 10th of September, eight years ago, the Count Dunault that is yourself—and the

Chevalier de Buradoc met in a prohibited gambling-house in Paris. Both were reckless gamesters; the chevalier an exceedingly skillful one, and he rarely lost; but the count was his match on the night in question. He had watched the chevalier's game, and was prepared for it. They were opponents, played light, and the chevalier lost. When he was stripped of every penny, of every franc, the count exposed him—called him cheat, trickster, swindler. This little bit of history about yourself seems to interest you. One would think you had never heard it before."

"On the contrary I am only surprised at your perfect know-ledge of it."

"Well, they quarreled—count and chevalier—came to blows, and were parted. De Buradoc left. The count was persuaded to remain for the night, lest they should meet again, and evil ensue. He did remain. It was a queer old place, this gambling den. In spite of police supervision, there are some such still existing. The landlord was very kind and considerate toward his guests. They drank wine together, and it disagreed with Dunault. He had to go to bed."

McDonald breathed hard in suspense. He was marveling who this man could be that knew so much.

"And he slept heavily," the artist went on—"so profoundly that he did not wake, until by some unaccountable accident, he found himself in the river Seine. I have said it was a queer old place. Its windows opened upon the water, and it would be charitable to suppose Dunault had wandered out of his bed in his slumber, and fallen in. He was drowning rapidly. You must have felt very bad at that moment, count."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FIGHT WITH A LION.

"I did experience pain as I was drowning," said McDonald.

"The very recollection makes you pale. However, he was picked up just when about to sink for the last time. He was supposed to be dead, and was taken to the morgue. The Chevalier de Buradoc saw him there."

"Then?"

"Then the chevalier went away satisfied, thinking his victim dead; and he would have died but for the care of a young surgeon, who had rather a startling theory, by the practice of which he could restore the drowned when life seemed quite extinct. The authorities let him have the count's (your) body to experiment upon, and the operation was successful."

McDonald leaped to his feet.

"Then he lives?"

"Lives! What a question for a living man to ask about him-self."

"The story comes so strangely now," said Simon, with a sickly smile, "that it scarcely seems like my own."

"It happened such a long time ago," said Hewbert; "and now, my dear count, the strangest part is to come. Dunault's papers were taken by the chevalier, who never heard of Dunault's recovery, and lately De Buradoc wished to give a new character to a man who had a very bad one."

"Hal"

"Do sit quiet. I never saw a man get so excited over his own history. So the chevalier gave these papers to a miscreant, who had been an incendiary, a duelist, and a poacher, by name Simon McDonald."

McDonald shook like an aspen. Discovery had come upon him, and he sat terror-stricken before the fair-baired artist, whose

brilliant eyes were full of smiling menace; it fixed the guilty man like a basilisk.

"And this miscreant, McDonald, came to Drocburn, bringing with him the heiress of Charnett, Lady Leonora's child; and you are the miscreant, I think."

"Who," asked Simon, hoarsely, and powerless still, "who are you?"

"I, like you, have a variety of names. At present I am Alfred Hewbert, and you the count; when we met last in the hut on Charnett Heath, you were McDonald and I was Robert O'Neil."

The poacher fell upon his knees before De Buradoc's bitterest foe. He was tracked out by the avenging Nemesis, whom treachery and violence could not kill."

"Be merciful!" he said. "Spare my wretched life! I am your slave!"

"I know it. Give me my—those papers. I shall take the child back to Charnett to-night. I give you a chance. Settle with De Buradoc as you best can, but keep this meeting secret, or I will drag you to the hulks. Leave England, but go alone; be honest, forego your infernal treachery to George Gambert, and leave Corinne the pure and honorable woman she is now. Come to the hippodrome and give the child to me. Then into your traveling-carriage with you, and go from Drocburn while I am merciful."

"I will do anything," said Simon, abjectly.

"I believe you would, to save the piece of breathing scoundrelism that in you takes the shape of manhood. Come—and mark me, no treachery to me or George Gambert; you know I never threaten idly.

Simon obeyed the speaker humbly. In his thought for safety he forgot all else, except that he tried to exonerate himself for his participation in the crime of abduction, by saying he had intended to be kind to Alice and restore her when he dared.

"O'Neil cut him short; he would not listen patiently. Mo-

Donald ordered his traveling-carriage and servants to follow at once to the hippodrome. He walked thither by O'Neil's side, his brain busy on the way; at the worst, he had a large sum of money and authority to draw on Michael's banker in Paris, and so long as he could hide away from Ewrick, he was safe.

The worst drop in the bitter chalice he had so suddenly to drain was the loss of Corinne. He knew O'Neil too well to think of waiting for or taking her with him, but the love of life and liberty was stronger than passion.

They reached the hippodrome just as Gambert commenced his exhibition with the lions. O'Neil and Simon took seats in the stalls next to Madelen and Lady Leonora's child. O'Neil was curious to see the performance; he could admire the masterly courage that enabled Gambert to do so much with the magnificent brutes he had subdued.

It pleased him to find he had won the little one's confidence. He patted her cheek when he sat down, and he had not been long by her side when, as the scene proceeded, he found her hand nestling in his.

But for O'Neil's determination to see McDonald out of Drocburn, and so prevent his treachery to Gambert, he would not have staid even to see the lion-tamer's splendid acting. His sympathies were keen, and he could feel how dearly a mother would prize each moment that brought her child nearer home.

The exhibition approached its climax. O'Neil noticed with a certain feeling of uneasiness that one of the lions seemed restive and obstinate. He observed that Gambert's play with him was not all sport. The other noble animal was perfectly docile.

George Gambert acted with more than usual energy, and drew down thunders of acclamation. The brave fellow smiled bitterly at the thought that the public gave him applause for what endangered his life.

The brute, which had been trained to be apparently aggressive, was breaking the limits of control.

The climax came; the lion sprang upon him, but it was in

sportiveness no longer; his teeth grazed through his skin and touched blood.

Then the wild, instinctive thirst was awakened, and Gambert said a prayer, for he was down upon his knee. He knew it would be a fight for life, and he tried to collect strength in nerve and muscle.

The audience were electrified; many of them had seen the contest often, but never seen it so protracted as now.

O'Neil rose; he would have fought a tiger or a demon, for he knew no fear; he saw George Gambert's peril, and said:

"You are in danger."

"Not if I can get my footing," Gambert said; and then the gallant Irishman leaped into the arena.

He seized the lion's shaggy mane, and struck it fearful blows with his clenched hand.

"If we live," Gambert said, "I will thank you for this."

O'Neil's voice rang out like a clarion.

"Let the keepers come," he said, "and bring a lighted torch.
Take the lion that is quiet to his cage."

He spoke too late. The keepers came; they were always in attendance now. They brought a lighted torch, and O'Neil took it, but they could not take the other lion to his cage.

The faithful creature saw its master's danger, and what it had been taught to do in sport, it did in earnest now—it sprang upon its forest brother and fought for its human master's life.

The spectators rose in a body. None thought of going out; the terrible spectacle chained them to the spot. Gambert's courage rose to fiery pitch. To be rebeled against by a creature he had tamed and fed, stung him to more than mortal dauntlessness. He swung his massive club like a sledge-hammer and dealt blow after blow upon the lion's skull.

The brute cowered for a moment. It seemed to recognize a spirit stronger than its own, and in that moment, to avert a worse catastrophe, Gambert signaled the keepers to take the docile one to its cage. It went at its master's word.

"Now," said Gambert, grimly, to the lion, "your deatl mine."

O'Neil was not idle. He beat the monster with his burn brand each time it sprang at George, who followed it and str it with crushing force. It staggered over, and fortunately, Gambert's club fell from his hand. He drew his revolver the

Twice he fired, and at the second shot it turned from with a roar of pain, half blind with the fire from O'Neil's br and its own blood. The entire audience seemed to give shriek, and shrank back to make a path, for the lion leaped barrier, and as it leaped with open jaws, seized a child—l'Alice.

O'Neil uttered a cry, and Gambert echoed it. The madde brute went over the people's heads and out of the hippodro: with lady Leonora's daughter in its mouth.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE.

The scene that ensued when the savage brute dashed through the shrinking crowd and bore its helpless prey out of the buing, was one never to be forgotten by those who witnessed The startling horror had reached its climax then.

Had it not been that the hippodrome was well provided vextra doors, which, in case of fire or panic, could be three open instantly, the sacrifice of life would have been terril. The whole human mass surged like a struggling sea toward outlets.

The people made their own danger ar paid the pena. All attempts to quiet them were useless, though some of actors had sufficient presence of mind to appear before the c tain and entreat the throng to keep their seats.

Men fought their way out in blind excitement, and those who fell were trampled under foot.

One gentleman, more thoughtful than the rest, planted himself at the wide central way and called upon those of his own sex to let the women go first, but the women would not leave their male companions, and the gentleman's appeal only succeeded in effecting a temporary cessation of the pressure.

George Gambert and O'Neil had followed the lion. The animal was dying as it ran, but it far outstripped them, and Gambert's heart was sick with a misgiving as he saw it disappear in the dim distance. O'Neil went with the speed of an antelope. Gambert could not make such rapid pace. He was very nearly exhausted by the struggle.

They lost sight of the lion's form, but were kept upon its track by the few scared townspeople who chanced to be wending their way homeward, and saw the maddened thing leap past them.

The chase was taken up by such as had spirit enough to risk the chance that it might turn upon them, but it was far ahead before it fell, and it was almost dead when Gambert and O'Neil reached the spot. Alice was not with it then. The heavy jaws of the brute were red, but the child was nowhere to be seen.

O'Neil thought of the widowed, desolate mother, and bitterly reproached himself for not having taken Alice from McDonald immediately upon his arrival at the hotel. The gallant fellow wrung his hands in anguish.

"Lost, quite lost, and I might have saved it," he said to Gambert, who stood gazing moodily at the fallen lion. "I can never tell those fearful tidings to the poor lady."

George Gambert set his revolver deliberately behind the lion's ear, and sent a bulk? through its brain. He was not satisfied till he saw its last throe end in the quiet of death.

"I thought it would happen some time or other," he said.
"I always doubted him, but I swore to either quiet, subdue, or

slay him. What child did you speak of, my friend? I thought it took Dunault's."

Even at such a moment Gambert did not forget to use McDonald's assumed name.

- "Dunault's—it was not his, the man to whom you give that name; the little girl belonged to the Lady of Charnett."
- "I saw the lion drop a little girl," exclaimed a bystander, who overheard part of what was said by Gambert and the other.
 - "Where?" asked O'Neil quickly.
 - "Up the lane a mile; some gentleman picked it up."
 - "Could you describe him?"
- "Not I. I came after the rest, and did not notice him, except that he looked like a foreigner, and I think I have seen him before."
 - "A foreigner? Where do you think you have seen him?"
 - "At the hippodrome—the French clown."
- "The clown," said Gambert, "Jaconet. Then the little one is safe, thank Heaven!"

O'Neil re-echoed the thanksgiving from his heart.

"Let us see at once," he said; "for suspense is worse than torture. Come, Mr. Gambert, the brute is done for."

The lion-tamer went back with his new friend, leaving the animal to the curious group gathered round it.

They walked back rapidly to the town, and went to the hip-podrome.

O'Neil had not, as yet, told Gambert that he had caused McDonald's departure. He thought it would serve no good purpose to let him know that Corinne had entertained the intention of being false to him.

- "If what was said by the man who spoke is true," he said, "it is strange we did not notice the occurrence. We went direct."
- "The road is dark," said Gambert, "the crowd great, and we thought only of the lion. But if Jaconet has her, she is safe."

- " Jaconet-a Frenchman."
- "Baptiste Jaconet—and a Frenchman, decidedly. You say the child is not Dunault's?"
- "I said a truth, Mr. Gambert, and I may explain hereafter. I can say nothing till I am assured of her safety."
- "Jaconet will take her to the hotel," said Gambert, too well bred to express surprise, "if it is he who has her; if not, we must make inquiries when the panic has subsided. My worst fear is that the little one is terribly injured."
- "I think not. I noticed that he had her by the dress and not the body. The shock—the fright may be severe, perhaps irrecoverable; the physical hurt not much."
- "Corinne would grieve," said Gambert; "she is very fond of the child. Doubtless we shall see her at the hotel, weeping over the little one, Jaconet being feted as a hero, and Dunault, whether he is or is not the father, delighted, for he loves her."

O'Neil had his own idea concerning the part McDonald would fill in the tableau.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FLIGHT.

Corinne was watching from the sidewings behind the curtain the progress of the exhibition, and when the fight began it was only by main force that the stage-manager and the prompter held her from going to share Gambert's peril.

When the contest ended, and she saw its thrilling culmination, she broke from those who held her and leaped from the stage to follow her lover. She loved him for his heroism, and had forgotten her tempter then.

But he was there. He caught her in his arms as she tried to dash into the crowd, and, in spite of her struggles, held her firmly.

"You must not go," he said, "it would be certain death."

"Oh, coward!" she said, battling with him, "to see him in such jeopardy and not help him."

"I had not time, Corinne. I was so appalled at the child's fate. And, Corinne, listen—that man who fought for Gambert is an emissary of the law, he is on my track to hunt me from Drocburn, and I must fly at once."

"Gambert, Gambert!" she said; "see what has become of him."

"He is unhurt. Think of me, Corinne! my peril if I stay."

Corinne sought to wrest herself free; the sight she had seen was subduing her faculties, and she grew dizzy; a moment more and she sank helpless in McDonald's arms.

That was the traitor's opportunity. His heart thrilled madly as he lifted the magnificent creature, dressed as she was for the drama, and bore her through the orchestra under the stage and into her dressing-room.

He was well known behind the scenes, and even if the present confusion had not prevailed, none would have questioned him.

The dressing-room was empty. McDonald paused a moment there to snatch a cloak and hat which Corinne wore. He showered burning kisses on her lips; and, as if she felt his unhallowed passion, her dark cheek flushed, though she was senseless.

The man forgot all save the delirium of desire; he cared nothing for the fate of Gambert or the child; he cared not for the menace of O'Neil; he thought to be far away with his peerless victim before the avenger could track him out.

Had Corinne been a child he could not have stepped more lightly with her weight as he carried her to the door. Fortune, or his evil genius, favored him; his traveling carriage was in waiting.

He put Corinne inside. His courier stood cap in hand at the door.

"For London," McDonald said. "Let whip and spur do their work. Every moment now is precious to me."

The courier gave the order, mounted to his seat, and the four swift horses dashed at a splendid pace through Drocburn.

Corinne, awakened by the rapid motion, found herself locked close in McDonald's arms, his hot lips pressed to her cheek.

At first it seemed a dream. The carriage light revealed her to herself alone with her lover, and in the attire that, apart from the profession, she abhorred. Her delicate instincts brought a vivid blush to her face, and she looked wistfully out of the carriage window as if for succor.

"McDonald," she pleaded, withdrawing from his embrace, and wrapping herself in the thick folds of the cloak, "let me go back."

"Never," he said, passionately. "What! lose my beautiful Corinne now that she is mine, and none can take her from me? Nay."

A dim fear of danger crept into her soul. Each moment that she spent with him, while the spirited steeds went onward, seemed to take her away from the sanctuary of pure womanhood. George Gambert's faith had kept her sacred; McDonald's passion had begun already to cast its shadow over her.

"Have we come far?" she asked.

"This is the last piece of Drocburn land, Corinne," and he glanced at the fleeting landscape. "I have escaped my peril, and you are with me. Why do you sigh?"

"It seems so cruel to leave Gambert in this time of trouble," she pleaded, with remorseful emotion. "I should like to have seen him once more, and parted in kindness. Shall we go back?"

McDonald drew her head to his shoulder.

"We are better as it is, my Corinne. We must forget him, and think only of each other."

"But he trusted me so deeply-was so good, so gentle."

"Am I not gentle too, Corinne? Is not my love as deep?—has it not outlived long years of absence, and grown stronger since we met? Give Gambert a kindly thought; he does deserve it, and I am not angry."

Corinne said no more. She let McDonald's arm encircle her; and her lustrous eyes, loving and mournful too, looked into his. What thoughts were passing in her mind he knew not, but they were sad ones he could see. She tried to read the future in his face, discover what the time to come might bring in return for the rash faith which had made her cast away a world of sterling truth.

They halted first at Springbourne, a small outlying town between the midland and the eastern borders. It derived its name from a spring, which was supposed to possess curative powers in most diseases to which mortal flesh is heir.

"You are the Countess Dunault," said McDonald, with a reassuring pressure of Corinne's hand. "It is necessary that you appear so to avoid suspicion."

The crimson glow grew deeper in Corinne's cheek. She made no reply.

The carriage had stopped at the Springbourne Hotel. The courier approached respectfully to take instructions.

"The horses are tired, Jules?" interrogated Simon.

"They require rest, my lord, and the next place is some distance."

"Very well, Jules; see if there is suitable accommodation for the countess and myself."

Jules, a well-educated German, who thought that next to being a gentleman of fortune there was nothing like being his courier, bowed lowly, but a twitch of the eyelid betrayed his surprise at hearing his master speak of Corinne as the countess.

- "Shall Madelen attend my lady?"
- "Madelen?"
- "Madelen, my lord. Madelen was one of the first who fol-

lowed Monsieur Gambert, and, seeing the carriage waiting, thought best to stay with it."

Corinne did not attempt to conceal her pleasure. The presence of one of her own sex was a protection.

Strange that she should have been glad instinctively of a protection from her lover.

The waiters, who had congregated before the hotel as the carriage halted, scattered to perform their respective duties when McDonald handed Corinne out. As the "count and countess" entered the hall, there was no one present but the head-waiter. Corinne's long cloak hid her theatrical costume, or that most pensive of head-waiters would have been led to entertain peculiar and erroneous ideas concerning the traveling attire of a countess.

Corinne did not feel at ease when the count conducted her to their apartments. She had taken the second false step, written a lie in calling herself the Countess Dunault, and outwardly compromised herself beyond redemption. She felt very keenly that her name would soon be a by-word among the servants McDonald had brought with him. They knew her.

The beautiful equestrienne was proudly sensitive. It chased her to the quick to think that a set of lackeys should sport with her fair fame, and jest coarsely about her after the manner of their kind. She looked a queenly being as she paced the room in angry shame, while McDonald, having thrown himself upon a couch, watched her with quiet exultation.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WOMAN'S WAR WITH HERSELF.

"Corinne," said McDonald, lowly, as the beautiful equestrienne paced the room impatiently.

The tone was irresistible to her; it subdued her anger, and her tone was supplicative as she turned toward him.

- "Have mercy upon me, Simon, for your own sake as well as mine, or shame will come between us, and I shall leave you in despair. See how my conduct may be misconstrued."
- "Not by me, Corinne, darling," he said, caressingly. "Sit here with me, and let me kiss that angry flush away. What have you to fear? what shame to dread? not the tongues of our hirelings. They have a liberal master, and they know their places depend upon their discretion; not the world—we owe it nothing, and can afford to despise its conventionalities. You are the Countess Dunault, and the sound of that will silence all report."
 - "I am not the countess yet. The servants know it."
- "You are anything I tell them," and McDonald caressed her cheek carelessly. He was quieter now that she was in his power. "You are anything you like to be, Corinne, darling."

The old fatal influence was stealing over her once more as Simon drew her gently to the seat by his side. His halfinsolent carelessness had always controlled her.

- "We are rich, my countess; for so you will be when we reach France."
- "When we reach France!" she echoed. "Are you mocking me, McDonald, or would you make me the guilty thing I feel already? When we reach France! Why, to travel with you unwedded till then would sink me irretrievably in shame."

"You traveled with George Gambert"—and still gravely nonchalant he smiled at her—"and there is no irretrievable shame upon you yet. You surely would not, for the sake of a conventionalism, have me risk my liberty and life by stating my real or assumed name in the course of a public ceremony in England? Is this your love, Corinne—a love which is nothing till a piece of semi-legal formality has been complied with?"

When he began to be reproachful, she was dumb.

- "I trust all to you, Simon. See you do not break that trust, or we had better have not been born."
- "Hush, beautiful tigress! To look like that and speak in such a tone to me! The servants shall be dismissed in the morning,"
 - "Not Madelen."
 - "Keep her, if you wish to."
 - "We can trust her. I am sure we can."
- "Women know each other best," he said, vailing a sneer; "and so that my love, my bride, is glad, I care nothing. I can tell you, Corinne, that some few hours ago I thought we should be parted forever."
 - "How?"

He told her the substance of his interview with O'Neil, suppressing only that gentleman's stinging bits of truth uttered in reference to Simon's character. Corinne watched him seriously during the recital.

When he had finished, she laid her hand upon his, and fixed him with a steady, unwavering glance. It troubled him. Her voice, musical, rich, and calm; her words, distinctly spoken and unmistakable in meaning, troubled him more.

"Simon," she said, "I have cast my fate with yours, and while you love me I shall never have a regret. You know how dear you were to me when we were younger; and if I cared for you then, how much more must I care for you

now? I have money, and, should you be poor, it shall be yours willingly."

"Corinne____"

"Wait till I have done; there must be no misapprehension of the truth. Granted that my love has made me rash—granted that I am compromised—granted that I have even been lured into a snare (and it would be hard, indeed, to think the only man I ever really loved had lured me into one), I am still what I have always been—true to myself. I wish to say frankly that there is something in you that I do not like—a levity, a want of reverence, a license that I feel is a danger to me. I knew you were a reckless man, holding a woman's honor in light esteem. Do not seek to be so with me. At the first symptom I should be what you have said—a tigress; a beautiful tigress, if you like."

She threw her cloak aside, knelt on one knee, and still clasping his right hand, placed the other hand on his shoulder.

"But if you are to me a true and honorable gentleman, giving to me a true and honorable love, respecting me the more for the very recklessness of faith which has placed me so hopelessly at your mercy, you have a devoted woman, who will cling to you to the end. I could share a bed of straw, a crust of bread, and still be rich, and more than rich, if you were so that I could always keep the old dream in my soul."

"My beautiful, brave girl," he said, repressing his kindling fervor, "I will be anything you wish, so that you shall not doubt or think me less than true or honorable. If you think yourself compromised, I will defy the worst danger to make your fair fame spotless."

"No; I care nothing for the world—you are my world now. Keep me enshrined as I have you, where all is best and purest within me, and strangers may cover me in black obloquy, and I shall not care; and so I trust you, Simon; and, till we are safe from your foes, let me be a sister to you;

love me purely, cherish me with your better nature—we shall be happier."

"Ay," he thought, "if the sateless devil were not in my soul, impelling me to your destruction, if I die a thousand deaths for it."

He strained her to him in a close embrace, and rose.

"As a sister," he said, "till-"

"Till we reach France."

Her lithe form, quite uncloaked, glided through the curtains from his view.

"Till time and opportunity give me a chance to talk you out of that mixed matter-of-fact and poetical philosophy," he muttered, smiling darkly. "Till we reach France—bah! I have always shirked the dull, deadening tie, and I shall not submit to it now, even for your sake, my magnificent Corinne."

The equestrienne found Madelen awaiting her. The poor French girl had been weeping sadly for little Alice.

"Madelen," said Corinne, "come here."

The girl rose in wonder, and smiled through her tears at the beauty of her new mistress.

Corinne threw herself into her arms, and clung to her as if to a refuge.

"Madelen," she said, with a simple pathos that moved the impassionable French girl's quick emotions, "never leave me till we reach France. Promise me, Madelen, dear."

"I will never leave you, madam; but why?"

"Oh! Madelen, I have done wrong in coming with him, but the fault was not mine. I love him, Madelen, and if I were tempted, I might forget to pray; but there is strength in sympathy, in confidence, and if you were always here——"

Madelen kissed her mistress warmly. She honored her for her truthfulness; the slender, girlish attendant took a womanly dignity by force of her position. "I know," she said, "it is sad to love too well, and men are cruel in their passion."

Corinne sighed bitterly. She felt singularly desolate away from George Gambert. She sat before the fire, with her arms round Madelen's neck, and her reverie was unbroken till the time-piece tinkling half an hour before three, roused her.

"We shall have to alter some of your dresses for me," she said, looking at her own superb limbs with a sense of shame never felt before. "I must not see the count again like this—it is not wise."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GEORGE GAMBERT'S DESPAIR.

When Gambert went back to the hippodrome, and heard what had taken place, he could not easily realize the truth. He heard the tidings from the prompter, who recounted the scene between McDonald and Corinne in the arena, and how the former had borne her away.

"In his traveling carriage?" repeated Gambert, in surprise. "Surely he has not gone; no, he cannot have gone, for Corinne is with him; but what he wanted with his carriage, I do not know."

O'Neil's heart smote him. He had turned his precautions against the very man in whose behalf he had used them.

"I did it for the best," he said, regretfully, "for I knew the traitor's purpose, and thought to save you from this misery."

Gambert's agitation grew intense.

They were in Corinne's dressing-room, and the lion-tamer was gazing in a bewildered manner at her dress, the dark velvet bodice and plain silk skirt, in which she looked so regal when dressed for the brougham.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

O'Neil told him what he had heard and witnessed Gambert could scarcely let him proceed to the end, but broke out hoarsely:

"It cannot be true. Why, she left me with a kiss upon my cheek, and spoke the softest and sweetest words I ever heard her speak; that was only just before I began my scene, and I think her very tenderness unnerved me. My old friend Mac a traitor, and Corinne a creature worse than I can name! I will not believe it till the proof leaves no room for doubt. Let us go to the hotel. I am doubting her without cause, perhaps, and I shall be sorry."

Gambert hastened to the hotel, and all he could learn of Corinne indicated that she had fled. He went to her boudoir and bowed his haggard face in his hands.

"Had she but told me," he said, huskily—"said that she found she could no longer love me, I should have got resigned to it in time. It would have been hard, but not so hard as this. I would have sacrificed more for her than she could ask, even to the giving her to another if it were for her happiness. But to feed me with sweet hopes, charm me with the witchery of her tenderness, and give me caresses, with the thought of falsity in her heart, and then leave me at a time when even a dog would cling to his master with double fidelity. I wish I could think of her in anger; but I cannot; I am too desolate for that."

He picked up a glove, it yet retained the shape of her delicate hand, and was fragrant with the soft odor of a quiet perfume; she had worn it in the morning, and he could fancy it yet warm; it was an impulse sorrowfully loving that made him put it in his breast.

As yet this almost mute heart-ache of despair absorbed him, he had thought only of the woman he had lost, not of the man who had taken her away.

Now he began to reflect on McDonald's duplicity, the coldblooded, heartless scoundrelism which he had masked under the aspect of a friend. Gambert was very simple-hearted in some respects; his own conduct was guided by his principles, and they were noble.

He left the boudoir as haggard and despairing as he had entered, but the ashen hue of his brown cheek was not all the effect of grief. The strong yearning for revenge was growing into conquerless desire.

What remained to be done in Drocburn was done with calm, methodical attention, and not one with whom he conversed saw on his face a sign of the suffering within. He was pale, but his pallor was the result of excitement. He made careful inquiries as to the extent of the injuries done during the panic, and found that there were numerous casualties, but no loss of life.

To those who were in need, he gave handsome compensation, and left a check with Mr. Bertram to defray any other expense or claim that might arise. He left the company in the care of his stage-manager, instructed him as to his route and the performances, and paid a month's salary in advance. When these things were done he felt he could devote himself to his task.

He went deliberately forth with a fixed intention to kill the traitor who had wronged him, wherever and whenever they met. He said so to O'Neil, and O'Neil saw it was a resolution he would keep.

"Give a thought to the consequences," said the young Irishman. "Slow and quiet revenge is better than a rash blow—a reckless deed of violence."

"I shall kill him," said Gambert, with unalterable determination, "and before her sight, if I have the chance. It is useless to reason with me. The man must die, and I am his fated slayer. I shall not be able to think of the consequence till I have done it."

"The law will not spare you," said O'Neil, "in spite of the strong provocation that more than justifies your intention; but

why not be revenged as surely without sacrificing a life too good to be cast away on such a worthless brute?"

- "How could it be done?"
- "Hunt him down. I will help you; for I show no mercy to the man who deceives me more than once. Hunt him down; tear him even from her arms, and drag him to justice. Say, 'This is Simon McDonald, the forger, the incendiary, and the homicide.' There was some powerful influence at work to shelter him while he remained in seclusion on Charnett Heath, but his protector is dead."
 - "And what would be his fate?"
 - "The hulks for life, should he escape the gallows."
 - "It would not be like killing him myself," said Gambert.
 - "But then your own life."
- "What there is left of it is nothing. I shall never be myself again. Except for my sorrow and the longing for revenge, my senses have died. I seem impelled by a power not my own; to seek McDonald out and slay him is a mania. When I have accomplished that I may change."
 - "And Corinne?"
- "I cannot hurt her," he said, his face working with anguished tenderness. "I did think I could, but I cannot. If I could make you understand how much I have loved her, you would not wonder at me."

O'Neil pressed his hand. He felt for him deeply. He could see the world of racking torture beneath the other's iron quietude; and he mentally registered a promise that should the traitor escape George Gambert, it should not be long before retribution overtook him.

"And now tell me what you have heard concerning the child," Gambert said, as calmly as though they had previously been discussing some ordinary topic of conversation.

"Enough to satisfy me that she lives," responded O'Neil, "and that the man who took her away is Baptiste Jaconet, your late clown."

- "But he is missing."
- "I can understand that very well indeed," smiled O'Neil. "He has a prisoner worth keeping."
 - "I cannot see his motive."
- "I can. Monsieur Baptiste Jaconet and I am not entirely strangers; and I am sure he must in some manner have gained an inkling of the child's history; but I shall find him. When do you go from here?"
 - "At once."
 - "And which road do you take? I, too, leave at once."
 - "The way they went," said Gambert, grimly.
- "That would be toward the metropolis. It is a singular truth that people seeking safety in flight from a provincial town, invariably start for London. Like feathers, they hover round the flame that is soon to scorch them. We will go together, Gambert, as far as we may."
- "With such pleasure as I can feel, we will. I am glad we have met, but I would it had been under happier auspices."
- "We have met in a time of gloom," said O'Neil. "The sunlight of dawn is to come. Let me give you an honest opinion."
 - "Concerning whom?"
 - "Corinne."

Gambert bowed.

- "Whatever temptation may have induced her to go with him," said O'Neil, emphatically, "she will never willingly be otherwise than a true and guiltless woman. Her infatuation may lead to indiscretion, never to dishonor."
- "I thank you for the poor girl's sake," said Gambert, somberly; "but her fair fame will be smirched, her soul irremediably tainted. I know McDonald well enough to feel assured she cannot long remain unsullied with him."
- "We shall see. I adhere to my belief; if you find her unwedded, you will find her pure as she is now, unless treachery or force has been used."

"Do not let us dwell upon it."

O'Neil said no more. The two lest Drocburn together—Gambert to find the track of McDonald, O'Neil to follow out his course—pick up link by link a chain that was to coil and rivet round the destroyer, and teach the Chevalier de Buradoc what a bitter, tireless soe he had in the Sin Phantom—the Avenger.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. PENTLAND'S VISITOR.

The departure of Lady Leonora from Charnett left Mr. Pentland in much perplexity; her intended course of action was a mystery he could not solve, and in her absence he knew all his skill would be needed to defend her child's inheritance.

He did not attempt to deny even to himself that the case presented features of unusual difficulty; to underrate the power of any enemy was not one of his failings, and the chevalier certainly had him at a disadvantage.

True, he held the chevalier at bay, so far that he could damage his character, brand him with the deep disgrace of illegitimacy; but it would serve no purpose beneficial to the lady, since he could not prove her right, and he knew with what keen and sensitive shame she shrank from aught that would slur the memory of her husband.

Pentland was prepared to find that Uxley and his client, Michael, would not be slow to follow up the advantage they knew their treacherous crimes had gained them; he pondered deeply how he should best meet them, and fulfill his promise to the self-exiled lady.

"It is so palpable, that to denounce them would be to jeopardize the child," he soliloquized, "and I have no proof against them save such as they could easily refute; my case, if stated in open court, would seem a wild tissue of romance. I need powerful aid, some one who has mastered the dark intricacies;" so he was thinking when his managing clerk entered to say a gentleman desired to see him. "A stranger?" interrogated Pentland.

"Quite a stranger," responded the clerk. "A Mr. Alfred Hewbert."

Pentland was in no mood to see a new client, and his first impulse was to refer him to his partner, Snell.

"He mentioned you particularly," said the clerk, "and I think I would see him."

The speaker was an old, faithful servant, and could venture to make a suggestion.

"Why?" said Pentland.

"He looks a gentleman who has important business."

"Then show him in."

The clerk retired. Mr. Hewbert entered.

His fair, frank face and quiet grace of manner prepossessed Pentland in his favor. He received him courteously.

The artist took a seat.

"You want help," he said, as though he interpreted the lawyer's thoughts, and was acquainted with his trouble, "advice and information in reference to the Charnett case."

The solicitor was on his guard instantly.

"This man," he thought, "may be an emissary from the chevalier."

The artist smiled.

"I am a friend," he said, "and not a scout from the foe."

Instinctively the lawyer began to study his visitor. He saw in him a quickness of perception, a power to see the workings of the soul by its denotement in the eye and face that would make him either a dangerous antagonist or a powerful ally.

"Prove that," he said, "and I shall be very grateful."

"Take my word for it, Mr. Pentland, and if you can imagine

a truthful purpose, you will see it in me. Your trouble is about the chevalier, or, rather, Michael Ewrick, for they are one."

Pentland grew reassured.

"The man who openly unmasks the enemy," he said, "can be no friend to him."

"A friend!" and the artist's bitter laugh chilled Pentland by his depth of hatred; "one who will hunt him to his doom, track his every step, destroy his every hope, and crush him into nothingness at last. Such is my friendship, Mr. Pentland."

"Then you will help me?"

"To the utmost. And now let confidence begin. I can trust you, and you have yet to see whether you can confide in me. Shall I commence?"

The lawyer inclined his head.

"Thirteen months ago," said Hewbert, "I went to Charnett in my present guise, as Alfred Hewbert, the artist. I thought to find the chevalier there, for I knew he had begun his work. I can add another dark page to the history you already know. Up to the time I mention, Earl Robert Lois was a hale old man in vigorous health. He began to sicken suddenly, then drooped, wasted away. Grief for his son did much. Sorrow crept into his heart, but insidious, treacherous death was stealing into his veins; his disease was inscrutable, it baffled his physicians, was a mystery to Doctor Hamilton."

"It was."

"Robert, Earl Lois was slowly poisoned," said Hewbert, solemnly; "and he would have died before he did had I not saved him."

"How?"

"I told the stud-groom, James Bingham, my suspicions, recommended him to the physician then in attendance, Doctor Hamilton's colleague, and from that time it was Bingham and not Stephen Lester who attended the earl."

The Ludgate lawyer listened with growing interest; he had not heard this before.

"If you knew this," he said, "why did you not denounce the murderer?"

"Ay, there comes the question which might be asked and must bear throughout the whole tragic course. The crimes began as they have been continued, with develish subtlety and devilish daring. The poison Lester administered was a deadly distillation that baffled analysis and left no trace. Chemistry is not a faultless science."

"But surely there were means of bringing the criminal to justice?"

"Doctor Hamilton's colleague was a Frenchman, as you may remember," said Hewbert, "a man of wondrous science, and he had a special interest in his patient's life. He could not save him. No skill could eradicate the fatal venom once instilled; no skill could prove its existence."

"Do you speak on certainty as to the poisoning?"

"On moral certainty. I could have sworn, but had no possibility of proving what I knew. My suspicions, imparted to the French doctor, coincided with his own. And so long as he remained to within a month of Earl Robert's death he took measures to counteract the influence of the drug, acting on the supposition that it was still being administered from time to time."

"And was it?"

"Not from the time it was given first till the doctor went, as he would have died almost immediately. His constitution could not have withstood it."

"Then in the end the shock of his son's death and not the poison killed him?"

"No; a rapid change took place in the last hour or less, and I should think that between the time he first heard of his son's return and the time of his being brought home a final dose must have been given."

"Doctor Hamilton never entertained such a suspicion."

"Doctor Hamilton is eminently skillful where he has a visi

ble malady to deal with, but I do not think the hidden phases of medicine are his forte, and discretion is not one of his larger characteristics."

"True."

- "The probabilities are that had any outcry been made, the tragedy that took place at the keeper's lodge would have taken place at an earlier date in France. It was a cold-blooded, deliberate act, premeditated long before carried into execution."
- "My own impression. Let me observe that your interest in, and acquaintance with, the Charnett family is not of recent birth."
- "My interest in, and acquaintance with, the chevalier is earlier."
 - "Was he known to you in Paris?"
- "Since," said Hewbert, with the strange smile he sometimes wore, "since a very dear friend of mine came to an untimely end. We were acquainted before, but did not grow intimate till after that event."
 - "Do you associate him with your friend's untimely end."
- "Why, yes; since but for him my friend would be existing now. Poor Dunault, I saw him at the morgue after he was taken out of the river, and I swore to avenge him then. I have never lost sight of the chevalier since."
 - "And you knew his misdeeds-his crimes?"
- "Every one. Does the question come again—why not denounce him?"
 - "Does it not seem strange to let him go untouched?"
- "It would seem stranger were we by rash error of judgment to sacrifice Leonora and her child. He must be met with patient caution, Mr. Pentland. I am in doubt on one point. Whether the man who now has little Alice is acting on his own account or in the service of De Buradoc."
 - "Alice? The man who has her now?"
- "It was a bitter disappointment to me. I had the child as close to me as you are now, and lost her after all."

- "So close, and then to lose her," said Pentland, with a sigh.
- "I traced the man who took her from Charnett—Simon McDonald, who has been a not idle participator in much that has been done. I caught him in Drocburn, and persuaded him to yield her quietly. But for the catastrophe at Gambert's hippodrome, she would have been with her mother now."
- "Her mother has left Charnett. Kendrake has gone too. But tell me what happened in Drocburn?"
- "Kendrake gone, and Lady Leonora!—when did this occur?"
- "Within these last few days—after my visit, when some discoveries were made that made our case more hopeless. You shall hear all, for I feel I can trust you, and it is the help of such a man I want."

Hewbert related the scene at the hippodrome—the battle with the lion, the panic, the peril of Alice, and the subsequent clew that was gained concerning her fate. When he mentioned the name of Baptiste Jaconet the lawyer started.

- "Jaconet!" he said. "If it be the same, his presence would be invaluable just now. He was a witness to Lord Sydney's marriage."
 - "It is the same."
- "The child must be safe then, if he has taken her in his care; but I cannot understand his motive in taking her from Droc-burn."
- "I think he must have become acquainted with ner story. There is a singular motive, Mr. Pentland; and Baptiste Jaconet may have a motive that we do not see yet. He does not mean too well, or he would not have taken her away."
- "It is hard to have lost her when she was so near," said Pentland, regretfully; "but anything is better than what her fate might have been. Her death would have been a bitter blow indeed."
- "Never fear. I shall find Monsieur Jaconet, and see what he means. Count on me to restore the little one to her mother.

And now let us enter into other matters of moment. What step has the chevalier taken—in conjunction, of course, with that respectable old saint, Reuben Uxley?"

"You know him, too?"

"With good cause. The old wretch and his accomplice tried to murder me. If it were not that I am specially saved by fate to be his destruction. I must have died ere now."

He recited the deed done in the study, when he was hurled down the well. Pentland shuddered.

"They are very ruthless," he said. "The man would steep himself to the lips in blood to accomplish his design, and Uxley would wade after him."

"The gray-haired miscreant! But I live to thwart him and my foe. Robert O'Neil will keep the oath he swore to his friend Dunault."

"Robert O'Neil! Are you he?"

"I am," said the artist, quietly. "I am anything or anybody, as the occasion may require."

"Then I have a friend indeed," said Pentland, who was no stranger to the reputation acquired by the terrible Chicto's chief agent. "Had I known you at first, I should have had no doubt."

"Why did Kendrake leave Charnett?"

"The lady doubted him. He left in heavy sorrow. I believe him to be faithful, but he has some strange, sad secrets which I cannot fathom."

"He has a strange, sad destiny," said O'Neil; "and I am sorry that his foster-brother's wife let him go in doubt. It must have pained him bitterly. I would not for the world lose sight of him."

"I know not where to find him."

"Fate will bring us together; its ways are inscrutable, but its work is sure. Now tell me this—has Michael made his claim?"

"He has, and I cannot battle with it, so safely has he hewn

his path. The Lady of Charnett cannot contest his right—the certificate of her marriage and the will made in her husband's favor are both gone."

- "His work, too. Well, it does but bring the end nearer."
- "The Charnett deeds were stolen from my private safe," said Pentland; "and now I have not an inch of parchment to defend my client's claims with. So you see the kind of men with whom we deal, Mr. O'Neil."
 - "I know them very well. But when did that occur?"
 - . "Shortly after the advent of the chevalier."
- "As might have been expected, if at all. But in spite of that—although it leaves us so helpless, apparently—I shall undermine the ground on which he treads, and bring him down. What steps have you taken?"
- "None. He is not yet aware that we have made the discovery."
 - "Good! Work silently."
- "The deeds are not quite lost. There are birds of prey, and lesser birds of prey. The eagle set the hawk to seize its quarry, and the hawk has not left its own nest empty."
 - "The metaphor means-"
- "That the man employed by the chevalier to plunder me had the documents copied, and kept the originals."
 - "A man of genius that. His name?"
 - "Wolf Blake."
- "Ha! an old acquaintance of the chevalier's. And so he has gulled the greater villain? That is as it should be. I see the motive. Should Michael succeed to Charnett, he will be at Blake's mercy."
 - "And Blake will be in danger of his life."
- "That is a certainty; but we must have these cleverly-obtained originals."
- "I have arranged for them already. There is a sleuth upon the wolf's track—a good one—Rodwin Duke."

O'Neil smiled.

"A very clever fellow, who does not often fail, and he tracked Blake down long ago. Does my suggestion meet your views? I think it will."

"Let me hear it."

"Do not contest Michael Ewrick's claim—acknowledge it; let him think we are beaten, and deem himself secure; it will be the keener delight to bring him down in the height of his triumph."

"To let him have his claim was my own thought, and then to work for means to baffle him."

"There are wanted—the certificate, the will, the Charnett deeds, and the witnesses to the marriage."

"Are the last to be found?"

"I pledge myself for them," said O'Neil, with the calmness of a man who knew his own power. "Baptiste Jaconet will not harm the child, nor betray her mother."

"And Mere Mignon?"

"Keeps a restaurant in the Place St. Antoine."

"Thank Heaven for sending you to me!" said Pentland, earnestly; "you seem to know the case and all connected with it as though it had been the one study of your life-time."

"I made it my study," O'Neil said, quietly, "for the sake of the Chevalier de Buradoc."

There was no emphasis, no effort of voice or action, but Pentland felt the significance of the undercurrent meaning through the speaker's words.

"De Buradoc is in London now," he said.

"I know," O'Neil responded; "at De Keyser's. Wolf Blake is in London, too; so is Rodwin Duke."

"That I do not know, but it follows. Blake was put upon the track of Dr. Hamilton with a dangerous intent, I am sure. The necessity, however, for injuring him was done away with from the time when the Lady Leonora left her home forever. The doctor and I returned here. Blake came after us; so did Duke." "Let him still retain his duty of surveillance," said O'Neil, "and act at once upon our thought. Set no bar in the way of Michael's claim; let him inherit Charnett. His reign will not last long."

"Can I correspond with you?"

"Yes; insert the two syllables, 'Watchword,' in the *Times* and *Galignani*. I will either write or come to you within twenty-four hours."

"And if you find the child?"

"You shall know at once. Do the same with me. Should you hear of Leonora or John Kendrake, tell him on no account to forget his friend O'Neil."

"I shall remember. Uxley will be here to-day. Would you care to see him?"

"I had better not. It would make him uneasy, and set him on his guard."

He rose to depart. The lawyer shook hands with him heartily.

"Had we met at first," he said, "the career of crime would never have gone so far."

"We cannot tell. It is fate; what is fated will be."

"A singular remark from you—logical, brave, gifted with a rare quickness of intellect, and a fatalist."

O'Neil smiled moodily.

"My whole life-time has been marked out," he said. "The hand of destiny has gone before me in every step I have trod. The course of some men is fixed—they do not shape their own; so it is with me."

At the door he turned.

"If you hear before I do of Lady Leonora, or of Kendrake, do not forget the watchword. Adieu. This will not be our last meeting. Be careful of the doctor,"

"You leave London?"

"I follow Baptiste Jaconet. I shall see Mere Mignon soon,

and obtain her written testimony on oath as to the marriage. I shall arrange to bring her when wanted, and with Jaconet."

He went as quietly and calmly as he had entered. Mr. Pentland followed him to the door, and watched his graceful form down Ludgate-hill.

"A singular man," he said, thoughtfully. "I am glad he came, and feel more confident to have his aid. He hates the chevalier with deadly bitterness."

The artist was not yet out of sight. Pentland saw him lift his hat to an elderly gentleman in sober attire. The elderly gentleman returned his salute nervously.

It was Reuben Uxley.

claim."

"Coming to visit me," Pentland thought, and he was right. Uxley approached, and perhaps thirty yards behind him came the chevalier.

The handsome face and stately head that towered above the crowd, the noble, king-like bearing which distinguished the Charnetts from other men, were not to be mistaken. The jaw was magnificently perfect, but a physiognomist would have shuddered at it.

VEW V GIVING UP THE CONTEST. The interview between Mr. Pentland and the chevalier was not of long duration. Uxley did not take a prominent part

in it. "We have come as a last resource, before proceeding to extremities," said the chevalier, "in the hope that upon second consideration you will see the justice of my friend Michael's

"Whatever I may think of its justice, Chevalier de Buradoc, does not affect my intended course of action. I may say briefly that it is not our intention to go into litigation. Lady Leonora has left Charnett, and your friend, Michael, is at liberty to take possession whenever he pleases."

The chevalier's eyes flashed with joy.

- "It is better so, Mr. Pentland—much better. It would have pained him deeply to have been compelled to drag the matter before a public court."
 - "Doubtless in consideration for her ladyship, of course."
- "Whom he would not injure for a thousand worlds. Ah, Mr. Pentland, you do not know my friend—his sympathy for sorrow, his attachment to her. What poor consolation he can offer will be hers."
- "It will not be needed, chevalier. Her ladyship, as I have said, has left her husband's house and disappeared."

The chevalier changed countenance. It was not part of his plot to lose her.

- "Gone! But surely you know whither?"
- "No; I have not the faintest trace or clew."
- "Strange. Her purpose,?"
- "To find her child, I think, chevalier. And now, since I have said there will be no contest, nothing remains to be done but to comply with the mere legal formalities—the proof of your friend's and Mr. Uxley's client's identity, and some evidence that he is really Lord Ewrick's legitimate son."
 - "Will that question be urged?" Uxley asked.
- "No. I said something in reference to a document which I thought was in my possession. I find I was in error; no such thing exists."
- "It does not," the chevalier said, mentally, "for I myself destroyed it."
- "Premising, then, that the necessary formalities are complied with," he said, "we have only to arrange generously for the unfortunate lady. Mr. Uxley has instructions."
- "It is Lord Michael's wish," said the Charnett lawyer, "that Madam Leonora St. Durys be allowed the sum of one thousand

pounds per annum for the support of herself and his cousin's child."

"Do not repeat that insolence, Mr. Uxley. Lady Leonora Lois desires nothing; she simply resigns all. Should anything transpire to alter the present arrangements, information shall be forwarded forthwith."

The chevalier inclined his head.

"If I might see the poor lady," he said.

"You may if you can find her, chevalier. And now good-morning. Your friend, Michael, is master of Charnett. Mr. Uxley is, I imagine, in future, solicitor to the estate. I have nothing more to do with it."

His manner was not abrupt, but it was sufficiently expressive, and the explicit tendency of his words was undeniable. The chevalier and Uxley felt they were dismissed, and retired accordingly.

Their triumph was but half complete; the end for which they had swam through a river of red crime was but half accomplished—Michael was master of Charnett, but Leonora was gone.

- "That troubles me," he said, when with Uxley in his business chamber at the hotel. "There is a mystery in this sudden capitulation that bodes no good. What think you?"
 - "There is mischief in it."
- "Yet we are secure. We can baffle scrutiny, defy detection. We have left no track. Reuben."
- "I mistrust his quietude. It was not the quietude of resignation, but rather that of one who, though defeated, meant to renew the battle when there is a better chance of success."
- "Be it our work to see that chance does not come. I have no fear; my heart is full of exultation. The grand old place the home of my ancestors—is mine at last."
 - "You had my promise that it should be, Michael."
 - "Have I forgotten it, old man? Tell Michael Ewrick aught

that he can do to prove his gratitude, and he will not bargain like a huckster."

- "It was not done for gold, Michael."
- "I know that well. It was out of some fidelity to me, and gratitude to the memory of a mother so terribly avenged; and so your hand."

The lawyer exchanged the pressure warmly.

- "I thought the day would come," he said, "when I should see her son the Lord of Charnett. I said it should, and I have kept my word."
- "Faithfully. Our foes are few; the most dangerous have gone. O'Neil will never come to haunt me again. I shall tread the Charnett floor securely now."
- "Do you know, Michael," said Uxley, with his voice hushed low, "that on the night I went with you to Lockstone, and returned alone, I saw, or thought I saw, the dead man sitting in my chair?"
 - "It was fancy."
- "It looked terribly real. I can almost see the still, steadfast eyes glittering upon me now."
- "Pshaw, you were fanciful and nervous. You have too much imagination."

The old man wiped away a bead of perspiration that came at the recollection.

- "The clock of Charnett church was striking twelve," he said, "and its echoes seemed to fill the gloom like a knell invoking him from the grave; and there he sat, with the blood upon his brow."
- "Tush! Phantoms live in fancy only, and it could not have been him alive again. The blow I dealt him would have killed a tiger, and even had that failed, the fall would have been fatal. Why, six-and-twenty hours must have elapsed between the time he went down and the time you thought you saw him."
 - "Six-and-twenty hours exactly."
 - "He could not have survived, even had he fallen and not

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died. Six-and-twenty hours in a closely-pent well full of foul air, and deep as Hades. Forget it."

"Would I could forget it."

"Did you speak to it—the phantom in the chair?"

"I was stricken dumb with terror. I shrieked out something, and fell in a swoon."

"So much for the effect of fancy; and when you woke?"

"The chair was empty."

"As it was when you fell?"

"Maybe; but in the morning a strange incident occurred.

A gentleman—an artist—who was in Charnett a year ago, came down looking for O'Neil."

"Looking for O'Neil?"

"Ay. He exchanged a few words with me, and as he went away he hummed the very song we first heard O'Neil sing—the French street ditty."

"There is nothing in that. Friends often pick up tunes from each other. What resulted from his visit?"

"Nothing that I heard. He staid a day or two, then went away; and I could almost swear I saw him in Ludgate as we came along."

Michael grew attentive.

"Describe him."

"A tair-haired fellow, with a frank face, quiet and prepossessing. I noticed that his throat and forehead were singularly white, and he wore his hair low upon the temples."

"I did see such a man," said Michael, troubled, "and was wondering whether I had seen him before, or if he attracted my attention by having an uncommon face. Do you know his name?"

"Alfred Hewbert."

"S'death! I caught sight of a card on Pentland's table, and it bore that name."

"Then depend upon it we are being watched," said Uxley; "and let us be prepared."

- "I am prepared to do ten times more than I have done to keep what we have gained. Let them watch, let them plot—play blood-hound till they tire. We shall baffle them as we have done before."
 - "I hope so."
- "My only care now is for Leonora. She shall be mine, no matter what the means. Her image is burned here in fire on my heart, and I shall never rest till she is mine."
 - "It will never be willingly."
- "So that she is mine, I care not how. She shall yield to gentle wooing, or fall into a snare. Passion has been the curse of our race, Uxley, and mine would have its sway were it hurled to destruction for its work."
 - "It is the Charnett's bitterest enemy."
- "Well, the scourge is hereditary—born with us; but my love for her is as deep and pure as passionate. Were she mine, I should never love another. Women have been but toys to me hitherto. I did not care a jot even for my wife."
 - "Your wife!"
- "I had one; the most beautiful woman in France, and the richest. I won her because I had many rivals. I married her for her money. She bore a son to me and died."
 - "And the son?"
- "Lives. A splendid, princely boy, with all the pride and beauty of a Charnett. You shall see him, Uxley, when I come back from Paris to take possession of my house."

The lawyer sat in gloomy thought, bewildered by the last revelation.

- "A son," he said. "I did not know you had been married."
 - "I do not talk much of my weakness."
 - "What have you named him?"
 - "Henri. Come with me to Paris and you shall see him."
 - "No; my work is not done here yet. I have to arrange at

Charnett for the reception of Lord Michael, and pray be careful to sink each trace of identity with the chevalier."

- "You will hardly recognize me, Reuben. This wild, luxuriant hair of mine cut close, my heavy beard shaven close, my face bare, but for mustache and imperial a l'empereur, and I shall be at Charnett royally."
 - "When do you return?"
- "Within a few days; a journey to and from the Continent is a matter of little difficulty now."
- "Charnett shall be ready to receive you and your son. A few handfuls of gold will win favor from the tenantry, and forgetting the dead, they will cheer the living. It will seem strange to hear a peal of welcome from the bells that so lately tolled the funeral knell of son and sire."
- "The way of life, Uxley. The same bells will knell for me and you, perhaps, within as short a time."

Reuben shuddered.

- "Not yet, I hope. I am in excellent health; as vigorous and strong as I was twenty years ago."
- "We age with time, Reuben. Death, with its keen sickle, treads in the footsteps of the pitiless giant who counts our sands."
 - "Peace! peace!"
- "Why," laughed Michael, "we should not talk of mortal things as though we were immortal; but I see you shudder; do not take to moralizing, Uxley; and adieu, till I return to Charnett."

"To Charnett," repeated Uxley, "you shall be welcomed."
The old man left his accomplice and started for his gloomy journey down the Midland line.

The boat express that went from Dover on the day after that on which the interview took place between De Buradoc and Mr. Pentland had among its passengers two who had met before. The chevalier was one, the other was an indefatigable

gentleman, whose luggage, simply a traveling valise, was ticketed "Mr. Alfred Hewbert."

These two met on the deck while the steamer cleaved its way through the moonlit waters. Both were experienced travelers, and could enjoy the beauty of the hour; the chevalier whiled away the time with a fragrant cigar, the artist trifled with a delicate cigarette.

The latter was a lover of music evidently, for as he paced the white planks to and fro, between the pauses of the cigarette, he indulged in several operatic selections, and invariably finished with a popular Parisian street ditty which the chevalier remembered to have heard across the Channel.

The tune seemed to haunt him; it also haunted the chevalier. He glanced at the fair-haired artist occasionally, and with no kindly interest. It would have given him much delight had the song been hushed, and Mr. Hewbert sleeping quietly in the channel bed.

The other passengers soon retired, and the artist and chevalier were alone. The man at the wheel was busy at his post; the captain was watching the shadowy line that defined the ocean boundary of Calais.

- "A pleasant night," the artist said, flinging away his cigarette. "My attempt at music does not, I hope, disturb your reverie?"
- "In no way," was the courteous reply. "You have a good voice, and I love the opera."
- "Thanks. And so do I. 'Le Prophete,' 'Les Huguenots,' 'La Favorita,' and 'Norma'—they are my favorites.'

The chevalier drew a deep breath.

- "' 'Norma.' You have heard Grisi?"
- "Who has not? I have heard Grisi surpassed."
- "Ah! by Titiens?"
- "No; though she can act thrillingly. I heard that matchless wonder at the Grand Opera, the lady who came and went so mysteriously—Leonora."

- "Leonora!"
- "You have heard her, too?"

The chevalier walked the limits of the vessel and returned before he could speak again.

- "I never missed a night while she appeared."
- "Some men are so infatuated. The lady has a strange history, by the way. You may have heard how she left the lyric stage and married a young English nobleman, Lord Sydney Lois, of Charnett, the poor fellow who was so brutally murdered in his native place. That was a cold puff of wind; you shiver. Pardon me, I do not speak to a countryman."
 - "I do not know. You are-"
 - "English. And you?"
 - "French."
- "I thought so by your charming geniality. Englishmen are bad fellow-travelers; they want to measure a man's social status before they open a lip to him, and the English tourist is always sea-sick. Mademoiselle Leonora was a great loss to the stage. Are you fond of singularities?"
 - "I am not morbid," was the Frenchman's reply.
- "Singularity is not morbidity in a Frenchman; it is with us. We, unless we talk of the horrible, become commonplace, inflict our company with the inevitable weather, which I began with, or hackneyed truisms that become tedious. I prefer singularities."
 - "And are conversant with some?"
- "When a man takes notice of any one line of peculiarity, it is remarkable how many instances he may collect."
 - "I have no faculty for such a study."
- "Then you may be interested in mine. I am fond of sensation, and the most startling I ever met I met at Drocburn, an inland town not many miles from Charnett, where that dreadful tragedy took place."

The chevalier inclined his head as though he wished to hear more.

CHAPTER XXXVL

A REMINISCENCE.

"As a Frenchman," continued the artist, "you may chance to remember a mysterious affair that happened some eight or nine years since, the disappearance of the Count Cymon Dunault?"

The chevalier did remember it very well, indeed; his dark cheek changed color, though he was a man of wondrous nerve.

- "Not distinctly," he said.
- "Ah! let me recall it, then. He was found drowned, and his body put in the morgue; I saw it there."
 - "You saw it there?"
- "Yes. A young doctor—a special friend of mine, who had a theory of resuscitation—took it away, and practiced his experiment. I am not prepared to say with what result, for my friend, the doctor, was very reticent upon the matter. I thought he had failed, until——"
 - "Until-"
- "Until I chanced to be strolling through Drocburn, not long since. I am an artist, you know, and there is some pretty scenery in Drocburn; and I saw the count there."

The artist's frank face was turned full upon the chevalier, and not a muscle changed. De Buradoc's heart was sinking heavily; O'Neil's dying oath recurred to him:

- "The Sin Phantom will haunt you even from the grave."
- "The count in person?" said De Buradoc; "surely no."
- "Some one who bears his name, then, at all events; though I, who know him very well indeed, could not trace the least resemblance. The count, when I knew him, was quite a young man. The gentleman I saw at Drocburn cannot be far from forty."

[&]quot;Some men age in early life."

"He propounded the same argument. He had a child with him—his daughter, so he said."

"Ah I"

"A sweet, sunny little one with golden locks, and the face of a seraph. Her mother must have been a very beautiful woman, for the child did not resemble her father, the count, at ali."

"I feel interested."

"I thought you would be—it is so sad what is to come. There was a hippodrome in the town—the programme included a dangerous exhibition with some lions, and one of the beasts broke beyond control, attacked its exhibitor, and leaped among the audience, seizing the count's child as it went."

The chevalier uttered a startled cry.

"The count's child! S'death!—curses on him! Was it killed!"

"That," said the artist, shaking his head gravely, "is a mystery as yet. It was not found when the lion-tamer and one of the audience overtook the lion. A shocking catastrophe, was it not?"

"Horrible," cried the chevalier.

"I do not think he felt it much, for he took advantage of the tumult to elope with the lion-tamer's favorite, a Mademoiselle Corinne."

"Traitor!" the chevalier muttered between his teeth; "he would keep me in ignorance that the child is lost, while he spends my money with a wanton."

"One of the strangest facts of the case is," the artist continued, "that when I claimed his acquaintaace he did not recognize me; and when I told him his own history, he hardly seemed to recollect it. Very odd, was it not?"

"It certainly was. One would scarcely think a man could escape such a death, and live through the horror of being laid out at the morgue, and then forget it; while you, a stranger, remember it so well."

- "My memory never fails me," said the artist, "especially on points that impress me."
- "What a scene to have witnessed!" said the chevalier, "that at the hippodrome."
- "It was. One of those things that curdle a man's blood. But I have seen worse."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

- "Is it possible?"
- "True. I saw a poor friend of mine, Bob O'Neil, fished up out of the Seine with a dagger in his throat."

The chevalier clutched at the bulwark.

- "A friend?" he faltered.
- "A very dear friend, indeed; I valued him dearly—his life is like a part of mine, and he has lately disappeared strangely."
- "What a catalogne of terrible curiosities you seem acquainted with, monsieur!"

The artist laughed.

- "I trust in my wish to be out of the commonplace I have not shocked you. I know the French character is sensitive."
 - "I am not. But he disappeared, you say?"
- "As suddenly as though the earth had swallowed him up. Do you believe in dreams?"
 - "As the result of heavy food, yes."
- "Ha, ha! Well, then, do you comprehend the doctrine of odic force—mental sympathy—magnetism?"
- "I have heard of it—we have it in the Corsican Brothers of Dumas."
- "An excellent illustration of what I was about to relate. You can call to mind the scene where the twin De Franchi appears to his brother."
 - "Oh, yes; I have seen Charles Fechter."
- "Then believe me when I tell you such things are. There was between O'Neil and me a sympathetic union of spirit, as great as that between the two De Franchi. Whenever he suf-

fered, I suffered with him. Whatever emotion he experienced, I shared. You are incredulous."

"No. Pardon me."

"Now, I will tell you a dream. O'Neil was in Charnett."

"In Charnett?"

"When the murder of Lord Sydney Lois was committed. He was fond of the study of crime, and his peculiar fancy for hunting criminals often took him into danger. And he was in Charnett when I had a dream. It seemed terribly real to me. I saw him in a gloomy old house, in a small dark chamber, with a darker room behind it, and he was conversing with an old man. And just as plainly as I see you standing before me, I discerned a figure in the second room, watching O'Neil with the eyes of a tiger."

The chevalier lit a cigar, and closed his lips tightly over it to keep them still.

"A singular dream."

"It was. And suddenly there seemed to be a quarrel. The old man hurled a lamp at him, and a trap-door opened at my friend's feet. He leaped over it, and battled with the would-be assassin; when the figure from the other room advanced, and attacked him from behind."

"And this you saw in a dream?"

"A vision. The fidelity to nature was life-like. Then all was darkness. Yet with that peculiar faculty that is at work in dreamers, I saw all plainly. That awful struggle in the dark. O'Neil stumbled, and fell gently down the abyss. His antagonist held him by the throat, and beat savagely at his brow with the butt of a pistol. O'Neil went down, and, before he fell, I heard him say these words:

"'Assassin, I am but one of a terrible league. You are doomed. The Sin Phantom will track you even from the grave!"

The chevalier shivered. It might have been at the intensity

with which the artist repeated the words he had heard spoken in a dream.

"The impression was so strong upon me," continued the artist, as if too much absorbed with his own narrative to notice any strangeness of demeanor on the part of his listener, "that I actually went to Charnett to look for him. And here we have the most incredible portion of all. It had occurred."

He repeated the last three words in a whisper.

"I found a letter waiting for me at the Charnett inn, and I saw a friend of O'Neil's—John Kendrake—to whom he had related the story after his escape."

"His escape!" and the chevalier's tone was one of more than ordinary interest. "Did he escape?"

"Oh, yes! He had been hurled down an old well. I am not certain as to the exact locality of the house, and O'Neil wished the entire affair kept a secret. But he did escape, and now he is on the track of the man who tried to murder him. He has sworn to hunt him down, and he will keep his word."

"Then it was no vision Uxley saw," thought Michael.
"O'Neil, my deadly foe, still lives to haunt me! And this man—does he know all, and tell me this to torture me, or is he telling it to me by some marvelous coincidence?"

His keen glance swept the artist's face, that was calm, impassive, nonchalant.

"It appears from what I can gather," said the artist, watching a cloud of smoke disperse in faint white wreaths, "that he is leagued in some way with our modern Fouche—Gustave Chicto; and in the course of his career he has made an enemy in the person of the man who tried to kill him at Charnett. It is a strange story, is it not? My faith in dreams is strengthened."

The chevalier made no reply. He walked aft. The boat had reached its destination, and preparations were being made to debark.

Long before the passengers were landed the chevalier had completely lost sight of his communicative friend.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT THE MERE MIGNON'S.

The glow of exultation which was in the chevalier's heart when he left England was quite faded out before he set foot in the capital of France. The victory he thought achieved was nothing since O'Neil lived.

De Buradoc was in no way a superstitious man, but he could not drive away a weird fancy that he was haunted, and ever and anon, while on his way to Paris, he looked around and behind him, expecting to see a shadowy O'Neil, or a living artist. He did not like that fair-haired stranger, who was so familiar and knew so much. The chevalier's subtle instinct saw danger in him.

But the poor tourist did not trouble him again, and De Buradoc, while traveling, struck suddenly upon a thought that startled and relieved him.

The fair-haired stranger was one of Chicto's league, perhaps, and though he knew of O'Neil's escape, he had spoken falsely in saying he lived.

"It is impossible," said Michael; "and even if he did escape, as he must have done, for this man to know so much, he could not have lived long. No. Then I have the mystery. He escaped and died, leaving his legacy of revenge to the man who spoke of him, and who is doubtless on my track. Be it so; having baffled O'Neil, I shall not fear such a one as my recent companion."

The misgiving clung to him, however; the evil deed done in the lawyer's house was known, and Chicto's terrible league was against him.

When he arrived in Paris, the chevalier went direct to the hotel where he had resided previously. He had a splendid suite

of apartments, and no sooner did he appear than a liveried servant met him with a profound obeisance.

"Where is Henri?" asked De Buradoc, quickly.

"He has retired, monsieur."

The chevalier passed into one of the bed-chambers; the beauty of his dark face grew soft with the gentleness of a father's love.

"Henri," he said, tenderly, approaching the bed whereon lay a spare, delicate lad of some ten summers. "Henri."

The boy woke instantly, and with a glad cry wound his arms round his father's neck. It was easy to see he was an only child, and, being motherless, gave all his affections to his sire.

"My father !"

"How beautiful you have grown," said Michael, with deep emotion, "and strangely like your mother! If her memory gives me a gentle thought, it is for your sake. Fortune begins to smile upon us. We will soon go to England together, to the home that is ours at last. Our home by birthright, lost by my sire, won back at a terrible price by me."

"Our home! is not this our home?"

"This?" Michael glanced round almost with disgust upon the almost tawdry boudoir that could bear no comparison with the solid magnificence of Charnett. "This has been the home of our exile; but that is past, and henceforth we shall live where we are masters."

"Is it far?"

"A distance that is worth the journey; a grand old house in a noble English woodland. Are you well enough to travel in the morning?"

"Ouite. I have not been ill lately."

"You must not be ill again," said Michael, warring while he spoke against a terrible misgiving sent to his heart by his child's short, quick breath and hectic cheek. "The air of my native place will restore you, Henri."

Now that the excitement was over, the gentle-hearted boy grew pale again. He lay wearily in his father's arms.

- "Are you tired, Henri?"
- "Not tired, but I am not strong."
- "Michael kissed him passionately.
- "I dare not think of it," he said to himself; "were this lovelink broken, I should indeed have toiled in vain, and the crime in which I am now steeped to the lips would seem more red in my desolation."

He broke off abruptly.

- "We must rouse you, Henri. This is our last night in Paris. Shall we walk through the streets and then go to the opera?"
- "The opera! ah, yes; Hutrine was telling me about the new singer, and Norma is played to-night. I should like to hear Norma."
- "Then you shall," said Michael, smiling. "But who is the new singer?"
 - "They call her Leonora."

Ewrick held his breath and whispered the word hoarsely:

- "Leonora!"
- "Have you heard her? Would you not care to take me?"
- "Heard her?" thought Michael; "her voice is in my ears sleeping or waking, and her form haunts me like a dream of madness. We will go to the opera."

The fashionable part of the French capital was brilliant with light and life when the carriage of the supposed chevalier drove from the hotel. Michael, engrosed by the absorbing thought of seeing Leonora once more, took heed of nothing on the way.

He did not see his fair, frank traveling friend, the artist, who had told him so much about the Charnett tragedies and the escape of O'Neil. Yet Mr. Hewbert stood on the edge of the broad pave in one of the boulevards through which the carriage passed.

- "Who is that gentleman that looked at you so earnestly?" asked Henri.
 - "Where?"
 - "He is gone now. A pale gentleman, with side whiskers."

The image of Mr. Hewbert flashed to his mind. He looked intently, but the pave was thronged, and the gentleman, whoever he was, had passed from view.

"Let them come," said Michael, in bitter despair. "Track, and dog, and haunt me as they will, they cannot take from me what I have won—and I am forewarned of O'Neil."

Some reflections troubled him—the fate of Leonora's child and McDonald's treachery.

Michael would have been more troubled still could he have seen what was taking place at a restaurant, not far from the Grand Opera, kept by a woman known as Mere Mignon. She had been a shopkeeper at Versailles.

Keeping a restaurant was a more profitable occupation, evidently, for the good dame thrived, and laid by a little store of money. She had a charitable spirit, and did not send the poor, whether stranger or acquaintance, empty from her door.

On the same evening there came a man who looked very poor indeed, and he had a little girl. It was not a secluded place, and the man, who looked poor, wanted seclusion.

"Mere Mignon," he said, "do you remember me?"

The woman looked at him steadfastly. His face seemed strange at first, but she recognized him after awhile.

- "Jaconet!" she said. "Baptiste! Oh! Mr. Lisle, how dangerous to come here!"
 - "But I am well disguised, Mere Mignon."
- "I knew you, and they would. Come this way, lest you are seen."

Ehe ushered him into a room behind the public part of her establishment.

- "The child is faint, M. Jaconet."
- "Do not speak my name. Call me Baptiste, as though I

were the poor workman I seem. I came here because I know I can trust you, Mere Mignon."

- "You were my husband's friend."
- "I want you to take care of this child—this little one. You shall be well paid."
- "I have bread to spare, Baptiste. Heaven has been kind to me."
 - "Then you will keep her till I come back?"
 - "Gladly."
- "Good! Now tell me. Where does the Chevalier de Buradoc reside?"
 - "At the Hotel de ----"
- "I must see him. While I am gone, be careful, Mere Mignon. Let no one take the child."
 - "Will she stay with me?"
- "She will do anything. She had a severe fright, and her reason is scarcely right. See how docile she sits."
 - "Poor little thing! Yours, Baptiste?"

He shook his head.

"Ask no questions, Mere Mignon. Should I not return, send for the Chevalier de Buradoc, and give her to him."

Mere Mignon promised. She could not comprehend the meaning of an event that seemed singular to her simple mind.

She promised to attend to his instructions. As a woman, who had had little children of her own, she could not but be won by the quiet, plaintive beauty of the child Baptiste Jaconet left with her.

It was pitiful to see so young a form so full of sorrow. The little white face wore a scared, wistful look, inexpressibly touching; and when Mere Mignon spoke to her, after. Jaconet was gone, her questioning elicited no reply, save one word repeated many times:

e.

"Mamma!"

"Tell me your name, darling?"

Mere Mignon took the fragile form to her breast, and nestled it caressingly.

"Are you afraid of any one? Don't fear. No one shall hurt you while you are with Mere Mignon."

"I am so afraid. Baptiste told me the man with the beard is coming after me, and I must not speak nor tell anything, or he will find me out."

Mere Mignon began to grow interested.

CHAPTER XXXVIIL

THE CHILD RESTORED.

There was some mystery to be fathomed, and to Mere Mignon, in common with most of her sex, the suspicion of a mystery only created an insatiable desire to fathom it.

- "The man with the beard cannot find you now. See! You are safe in Mere Mignon's room. So tell me—where did you come from?"
 - "Herne."
 - "And where is Herne?"
 - "Down the lane—a long way."
 - "Poor little thing! Is mamma there?
- "Mamma is; but papa is dead. He was buried in the vault, and I was dressed in black. Poor papa, who loved me so?"

The Frenchwoman's eyes were moist with tears. She could have wept at the child's innocent, unconscious pathos.

- "Tell Mere Mignon your name, and she will let mamma know where you are."
- "Will you?" said the little one, eagerly; then her face clouded. "But everybody promises to take me back to-morrow—and to-morrow never comes."

"But I will tell her, and she will come for you."
The child, reassured, whispered:

- "Alice! Don't tell Baptiste I told you."
- "No. But what else? Alice--"
 - "Alice Sydney Lois, of Charnett."
 - "Merciful Heaven!"

The woman looked at Alice as she might have looked had a specter suddenly appeared before her.

"Sweet angel! What can this mean—so far from home? And your mother here in Paris, on the stage again? Cling to me, darling! Not the Chevalier de Buradoc nor Baptiste either shall take you away. Your mother—your mother—she shall have you—none other!"

The woman took action then with an energy beyond her years. She opened the door, and called:

"Jaques! Jaques! come here!"

Jaques, a slim youth, in white blouse, peaked cap, and heavy sabots, ran to her.

"Hasten, Jaques, to the stage-door of the Grand Opera, and make your way to the interior. Fortunately, they will let you pass. Ask for Madame Leonora."

"Will they let me speak to her?"

"They must. Say they must. And when you see her, tell her, for the love of the child, to come at once to Mere Mignon's restaurant. That is all. Oh, stay! Put up the shutters, lock the door, and let no one enter. I will go, and take the child with me. A mother's heart must ache to see her little one."

"My mamma!" said Alice. "My mamma! Are you going to take me to her?"

"Now—this very instant, darling. Why, only think—in five, six, seven minutes, Alice will be in mamma's arms—and Mere Mignon will have done it!"

That instant Baptiste Jaconet entered. He wondered much when Mere Mignon put the child behind her and confronted him.

"The chevalier is gone to the opera, and I cannot see him till he returns. Why do you stand before her, Mere Mignon?"

"Were you a tiger, I would stand before her, Baptiste! I know not what evil you may mean—but there must be evil, or you would not seek to keep her from her mother."

The clown's countenance changed and assumed a singular expression.

- "Her malady," he said, touching his forehead, with a pitying shrug; "she has been talking fancies."
- "Truth, Baptiste—truth. You—we were at the marriage of her mother to the English milord, Sydney Lois, of Charnett. And her mother is now at the Grand Opera, and she shall have her child."
 - "Mere Mignon!"

The severe face grew stealthy and furious—his fingers worked nervously. Hearing a woman's threat was as if she had robbed him of a fortune.

"The child!" he said. "Give her to me!"

The woman saw peril in his glittering eyes, and her measures for self-preservation were taken promptly.

"Jaques!" she said.

The boy opened the door. He seemed to see his mistress was in jeopardy; and, without a word, he stooped and took off one of his heavy wooden-soled sabots.

- "What is the matter, Mere Mignon?"
- "I fear this man. Baptiste, for your own sake, do not force me to summon help. The mention of your name in Paris—
 Oh!"

The very thought was as effectual as the presence of Jaques with his sabot. Jaconet recoiled.

"The mention of whose name in Paris?" asked a quiet voice; and a fair-haired Englishman pushed the door quite open.

A thrill ran through him from head to foot. A fire kindled in his eyes as they fell upon the child.

"Alice!" he said. "Mere Mignon, and Monsieur Jaconet!" The clown uttered a suppressed cry of terror. O'Neil—for it

was he—without appearing to notice him further, knelt and kissed the child.

She knew him again. He came to her like a second salvation.

"Mere Mignon," she said, "do not hurt Mere Mignon; she is going to take me to mamma."

"So Mere Mignon is our friend?" he said, with a quiet smile.
"That is all the better for Mere Mignon. But, Monsieur Baptiste—don't slink out of the door, Monsieur Baptiste. Two of the secret police are waiting for you out there, if you emerge without me."

Jaconet cowered down in fear.

"But if you remain here, Monsieur Baptiste—here, in this house—and wait till Mere Mignon and I return from the Grand Opera, we may so arrange it that the police will go, and leave you at liberty. I want to have a little talk with you when I come back."

Jaconet had no alternative but to submit. He bowed humbly.

"I need not lock you in," said Robert O'Neil; "you will scarcely leave a pleasant place of safety and seek the company of Chicto's ministers. Come, Mere Mignon—come, Alice; we shall take you to your mother at last."

He went, carrying little Alice, and followed by the Frenchwoman, who made no opposition, though she did not know him. That fair-haired artist exercised a singularly subduing power over all with whom he came in contact.

He arrived at the opera-house when the great lyric tragedienne, whose reappearance had electrified all Paris, was going through her chief scene in the second act. O'Neil did not heed manager or public. He had but to display a pass that would have as easily taken him into an imperial presence as behind the scenes—and he went through unquestioned. He led Alice to the side wings.

Leonora turned and saw her.

The sight struck mute her glorious flood of song, but it filled her heart with a glorious flood of joy; and the single, wild, glad cry she gave was music in the ear of Heaven. She leaped to the wings—almost mad in her delight—and crushed little Alice to her breast.

The scene was too sacred for even the astounded manager to interfere with. O'Neil quietly advised him to ring the curtain down, or find another prima-donna to finish the evening. The manager wrung his hands. O'Neil and Mere Mignon led Leonora to the dressing-room—she could not speak to thank them yet; but her look was eloquent with depthless gratitude.

Mr. Alfred Hewbert now went to the front of the house. He liked a certain sort of sensation, and was going to indulge himself in a second touch of it.

The Chevalier de Buradoc, astounded like the rest, was sitting in his box, waiting an explanation of the startling interruption to Leonora, when the calm, musical voice of his artist acquaintance on the Calais packet, said:

- "It is all over, monsieur—the curtain will not rise again now—the lady cannot sing any more to-night."
 - "How?"

"You recollect the tragedy we spoke of in connection with this same lady? How the child was stolen and lost again at Drocburn? I forgot, I think, to mention my knowledge that it was her child, and not the Count Dunault's. Well, this same child—Alice Lois, of Charnett—I found in a Paris restuarant, and so I took her to her mother."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONCE MORE AT CHARNETT.

The artist seemed to haunt the chevalier. The frank, fair, face was like a fatal vision; the pleasant, musical voice a knell of doom.

De Buradoc, started into sudden terror, sprang from his seat by Henri's side, and turned to face his acquaintance of the packet.

Mr. Hewbert met him with a very quiet smile.

"Our manager has made a bad engagement, I fear," he said, with much nonchalance. "The season promised to be prosperous. What a pity this incident occurred."

"Who are you?" asked Michael, hoarsely.

"Who am I? Pardon me—a very forgetful person, or I should have given my card before. There it is—Alfred Hewbert, a disciple of Rembrandt, whom I love. I like his terrible light and shadow. Your painter should have been Salvator Rosa. You really have a magnificent head."

"Confusion!"

"Ha, ha! You are just the man my friend Bob O'Neil would like to meet. You ought to have known him. What is the matter?"

Such an awful change swept over the face of De Buradoc, that Henri rose in alarm and confronted the stranger. The boy's instinct told him that his sire was in peril.

"Is the opera to be replaced by a tragedy?" asked Hewbert, laughing. "We have heard of such things. A tragedy is not always acted on the stage; and many a heart in the auditorium is playing a little drama of its own while the curtain is down."

The chevalier recovered his self-possession and shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur is pleased to be eccentric."

"It is a way we English have. What a face that gentleman opposite has. Do you know him?—he seems to know you."

Michael, following the other's glance, became deadly pale.

"The visage of fate," said Hewbert; "the eye of destiny. It is Gustave Chicto."

"Gustave Chicto?-ha!"

"Au revoir, monsieur. I want to speak with Chicto. I am sorry to have spoiled your Norma. We shall meet again."

The fair-haired artist passed the chevalier, and went round to the other side of the house.

Michael drew a deep breath when he was gone, and clutching Henri's hand, went from the building. He cast a second look behind him. What he had seen and heard this night had unstrung his iron nerves.

"The crisis!" he muttered—"the crisis is near. I must to England. I am safer there."

The man to whom the artist went had, as he had said, the visage of fate, the eye of destiny. That same eye and visage had struck dread into men of sterner souls than the Chevalier de Buradoc.

It was Chicto—Gustave Chicto—before whose renown the fame of Fouche was a shadow; Chicto, the incomparable, the master-spirit of his day; Chicto, who had but one equal, and that one was Robert O'Neil.

The countenance was immobile and severe—inscrutable, yet full of power. He had acquired the art of concealing thought, and his features were rather a mask than an index to the mind.

O'Neil approached him.

"Is it time?" he asked, laconically.

The answer was as laconic and as significant.

"It is time."

The two men parted without another word. Not much had been said, but the little spoken was sufficient to seal the fate of Michael Ewrick, Chevalier de Buradoc.

O'Neil lest Chicto and followed the chevalier.

"It is time," he said, mentally, "even had not the chief of our league said so. Michael's career is nearly over. It will end where it began—in Charnett."

The artist returned to the restaurant. Two men in close-fitting, closely buttoned black coats were outside. They were members of Chicto's league—the celebrated "Black Coats;" and at present they were keeping guard over Baptiste Jaconet.

"You can go," O'Neil said, in the tone of one accustomed to be obeyed.

One of the Black Coats made a gesture of dissent.

"What does that mean?" the Sin Phantom inquired.

The answer was another gesture—a sign of the cross, beginning downward on the breast; and O'Neil repressed a slight shiver.

- "Poor Baptiste," he said, "surely he has done no harm?"
- "He is a traitor—a Bourbonist. We have proof."
- "Then farewell, Jaconet," said O'Neil, as he entered the restaurant. "I will see that his last deed is a good one. He shall help the Lady of Charnett to her rights."
- "Baptiste," he said, when he stood before the Frenchman, whom he found crouching exactly as he had left him, like a hare cowering in his fear, "I want you to give me on oath, in writing, a deposition to the effect that you witnessed a marriage."

The clown raised his haggard brow.

- "A marriage?"
- "Between Leonora St. Durys and Sydney Lois, or Charnett. They were wedded at Versailles, by Pere Legrand. Mere Mignon and yourself were witnesses."
 - "Readily, monsieur, readily; and then can you save me?"
 - "Save you?"
- "Oh, monsieur, I watched the Black Coats, and I saw their sign. Tell them I am innocent; I have not betrayed."
- "Hush! If Chicto's fiat has gone forth, there is nothing to be done—nothing but to meet your fate like a man. Avoid it if you can."

The wretched man shook with agony.

"Take me with you, monsieur, out of this city—take me with you!"

"Write," said O'Neil, hiding the pity he felt. "There is no time to spare."

Jaconet obeyed him mechanically. He took a pen and filled a sheet of paper rapidly with the declaration required. That done he threw himself at O'Neil's feet.

"If they will let me live," he said, "across the seas—anywhere—anywhere!"

O'Neil, pale and quiet, said nothing for a while. He could not promise hope.

Jaconet, before his time of exile, had belonged to one of the anti-Napoleonic secret societies, and during the brief time of his return he had sought to betray his brotherhood. The Black Coats, who were in the mysteries of every combination, had discovered his treachery, and Jaconet was doomed.

"Take me with you!" Jaconet pleaded-"save me!"

"I dare not," replied O'Neil. "Follow me if you will, but I cannot interfere."

He put the written declaration in his pocket and left the house.

Jaconet accompanied him like a trembling dog at the heels of his master.

O'Neil walked quickly, as if to escape the knowledge of a tragedy.

They had not gone far before he heard a stifled cry, and, turning on the instant, he saw the clown stagger. Two dark forms vanished in the distance.

Jaconet fell under one of the lamps in the boulevard. He was dead before O'Neil could lift him from the pave. The dagger of the league never failed.

Next day the body of the clown was exposed at the morgue. No one came to recognize—no clew was given to the motive for his assassination. He was buried.

On the same evening, O'Neil waited upon Leonora at her hotel. Little Alice and Mere Mignon were with her.

"The worst bitterness is past, I trust," said the young Irishman, "and what remains to be done will be accomplished soon."

Leonora gave him her hand. Her beautiful dark face was full of gratitude.

"We are strangers," she said; "but I have much to thank you for. I have heard from Mere Mignon how deeply I am indebted."

"Madame," he said, gravely, "I am John Kendrake's friend. What I have done has been for his sake and your own. See here; I have the proofs that are wanted. Your enemy, when he destroyed the register of your marriage in the chapel at Versailles, did not think of me."

He gave her the certificate of her wedding and Jaconet's declaration.

Leonora surveyed him in wonderment.

"You knew--"

"All," he said, emphatically. "Believe me, madame, mine is no common interest in your welfare. Your child is safe, your name free from dishonor, and now we return to Charnett."

Leonora smiled—then shuddered.

"Not there," she exclaimed; "I cannot go there; it is a sepulcher to me."

"But to avenge your husband."

Her eyes kindled.

"To give your child her birthright."

"No more," she said, looking at the handsome and graceful figure of her singular friend. "I know not why you take this deep interest in me, I only know that I can never repay you."

"I shall be repaid, madame. Take John Kendrake back into your confidence; let his sorrowful destiny be less bitter for your faith, and I am quite content."

"It is for love of him, then, that you do this?"

"Your husband was my friend," he said. "The fortunes of the House of Charnett are strangely mixed with mine. So, for love of Sydney and his foster-brother, and for hate of your foe---"

"My foe?"

"The Chevalier de Buradoc."

The name struck her like a pang.

"Why is he my foe?"

"For love and hate, as I am his. Question me no more now. When all is done, the mystery shall be told."

That night the Lady Leonora, with her child, Mere Mignon, and Robert O'Neil in company, left Paris for London, en route for Charnett.

That night Mr. Pentland received a telegram; it contained these words:

"Leonora is with her child. If there be a reply, send to Dover."

At Dover he received a reply from Mr. Pentland:

"I have found John Kendrake."

CHAPTER XL

A BAD MAN'S ENTREATIES.

The quondam poacher had not left Springbourn yet. He had never for a moment relinquished the desire that had made him so base a traitor to his friend; but Corinne was true to herself and to her womanhood, in spite of her infatuation. It was a weak, not a guilty love.

Madelen was her safeguard. The girl tended her new mistress with a vigilant pertinacity that never left her an instant in McDonald's power, and exasperated him the more because he could take no measures against her.

McDonald was not unconscious of the peril that menaced

him at each moment of his stay in the quiet town, but the restless demon haunting his soul would not permit him to arrange a definite course of action.

"But for that meddling girl," he thought, with an oath, "Corinne would have been mine ere this. I must get rid of her."

It was a determination more easily arrived at than accomplished. Madelen met his artifice with womanly tact.

The beautiful equestrienne knew her danger. Bitterly had she reproached herself for the rash step which compromised her fair fame, and made her, though innocent, seem shameless. She would gladly have left McDonald, but dared not hint or attempt it, lest, driven to desperation, he should insure his own triumph and her hopeless degradation.

Corinne was very brave; she did not shrink from the truth of her position. Hers was a sterling honesty that despised the transparent sham of ignorant, false modesty.

"Simon," she said, when, after many promises that they should start for abroad and be united in wedlock, he had once more broken his word, "why keep me here, so that each day I seem to be worse?"

"It is a pleasant place, my countess," he said, passing his arm round her pliant waist, and holding her tightly though she strove to put his arm away, "and we are happy:"

- "I am not happy, Simon."
- "Why, darling?"
- "Why?" and her glorious eyes flashed fire at his careless insolence. "Did I lose all self-respect when I loved you?"
- "I hope not, Corinne, my lovely tigress, as you are when angry. "I wish I could quench these silly scruples."
 - "And make a wanton of me, McDonald?"
- "Harsh words from such sweet lips, my beautiful. I would teach you to love me, that is all."
 - "Have I not proved my love?"
 - "Like a fair disciple of old Plato, who was a hypocrite, be

lieve me. What strength is there in that affection which will risk nothing till treated by a legal form—that can only bind our hands and yet leave hearts unfettered? I thought you despised such trammels, Corinne."

- "My mother loved my father dearly, and he was a man of honor."
 - "What does that imply?"
- "He married her, and," she added, abruptly breaking from him, "I must be your wife, or we part to-night.".
 - "Corinne," he said, reproachfully, "have I offended?"
- "You have. I am no schoolgirl to be cajoled by sophistry, lured into an abyss, tempted to a brief dream of delirium, the waking from which would show me myself shadowed in terrible infamy."
 - "You do not mince your words, Corinne," he said.
- "I have seen the world, Simon—heard it speak in terms that have left no doubt of its meaning—and if I speak without reserve, it is because we may understand each other better. If women were taught in girlhood to look boldly at the truth, and not to affect an innocence of knowledge that cannot exist, there would be fewer left to misery and sin."
 - "True."
- "Don't smile at me in that way. George Gambert loves me better than you do; he is a better man than you, and he never dared look or speak in such a way. Heaven help me if in choosing you I have done unwisely."
 - "Come here, Corinne, and sit down."
 - "No."

He rose, and taking her hand, led her back to the couch. He looked with tender deprecation into her eyes and kissed her dewy lips.

- "My glorious Corinne, no wonder Antony let an empire go if Cleopatra were half so beautiful. I love you more madly every hour."
 - "Love me less madly and more wisely, Simon."

But though she spoke calmly, her whole frame trembled at his touch. He felt the thrill, and exulted inwardly.

"What would you have me do, Corinne?"

"Take me away from here; they think me your wife."

"So you are, in the sight of Heaven."

"Ay; but it is not sworn at the altar. There is a charm and a sanctity in the simple, hallowed words that make such love as mine doubly sacred. How sweet it must be to look back on the past and see no shame. Those who have never fallen can never know the unembittered happiness known by those who have wedded pure."

"Unanswerable logic that, my Corinne, and you urge it upon me as though I had a thought less than reverence, a passion less pure than purity; surely if I am content to live like this, to worship you and know no sweeter reward than to clasp you to my heart and kiss your lips, you are content too."

"If it were true—and you know it is not—Simon, I could not be content while each hour of our companionship sets a wide gulf between my good name and me."

He winced.

Corinne's brave, uncompromising honesty staggered him. She met him fearlessly on his own ground, and left no specious sophistry or argument to urge.

"To-morrow morning," he said, rising and imprinting another caress upon her warm cheek, "we depart for the Continent, and then Corinne shall be my bride."

"Whither you please, Simon; anywhere with you. And, recollect this—I intrust my happiness to you, knowing that you are not rich."

"Not rich? I have a full purse and an unlimited order on a French banker. We are rich, my Corinne."

"We are better poor, Simon, than rich with the wages of sin. I have plenty of money, and when that is gone, I can work for more."

CHAPTER XLI.

MCDONALD'S EXPIATION.

Corinne's unselfish, devoted generosity touched even Simon's depraved heart.

- "I shall be fallen very low indeed, Corinne, when I let the woman I love work for me."
 - "You will be fallen lower if you keep the reward of crime."
- "Tush! man has but one life to live, and he must make the best of it."
- "Having but one life to live, Simon, a brief life, a brief prelude to an eternal hereafter, men should not make the worst of it. I must have my way in this. I should not be happy if a penny of that money were spent on me."
- "Look at me like that, Corinne, and I am powerless. Ask what you will, I can but consent."
- "Then go at once and arrange for our departure in the morning."
 - "See, I obey; so for an hour adieu."

He strained her to him in a close embrace and left the chamber. His treacherous countenance changed before he had crossed the threshold.

"If there is virtue in a soporific," he muttered, "my fine lady will be less proud before the hour of our departure. I can read her mind; it is full of doubt, and wavers between her fear to love me and her desire to leave me lest I wrong her. I have tamed prouder women. To make her mine only by the dull, 'old-fashioned tie of wisehood would be to destroy the charm of her wild love."

The cold-hearted libertine who had deliberately deceived his friend went out, as deliberately plotting to deceive Corinne. When he returned to the hotel he carried a small vial filled with a powerful drug in his waistcoat pocket.

As he passed the stable gateway by the side of the hotel he saw a man crouching by the wall in the attitude of a mendicant. He was apparently bowed with age, and wore a tattered cloak.

"Would you help a poor man who is out of work?" said the mendicant; "I have walked a long way, and am very tired."

McDonald was rarely generous, but being elated with anticipated triumph, he flung a shilling to the beggar.

"Thanks-thanks, good sir."

Had not McDonald entered the Springbourn Hotel without looking back, he would have been startled by the change in the aspect of the man who had solicited alms.

The mendicant cast away his tattered cloak, and with it went his apparent age. A tall, majestic form stood out grandly in the gateway.

"At last!" he muttered, with a lurid, quenchless fire in his gaze; "and I kept my fingers from his throat! It was a mighty struggle, but not to wreak my vengeance before her were to lose half my revenge."

And, with something tigerish in the lithe elasticity of his walk, the seeming mendicant went into the hotel, and hired an apartment for the night. It was near sunset then.

His apartment was over Corinne's bed-chamber, and to and fro on the carpeted floor he paced hour after hour.

McDonald went to his room, opened the wine cupboard, and poured the contents of the vial into the decanter which contained Corinne's favorite liquor. He smiled like the villain that he was.

"Stratagem after possession," he said; "and this will not fail."

If Corinne had been warned by the mistrust which had grown of late, she would have noticed and interpreted the evil on his features during dinner-time; but his ostensible acquiescence had calmed down her misgiving.

Corinne, pressed by him, drank more than her accustomed

quantity of wine, and detected no alteration in its flavor. Madelen, who was less a servant than a companion to her, drank with her.

After dinner both were oppressed with an unconquerable drowsiness. Corinne, after fighting in vain against the coming lethargy, was compelled to retire. Madelen went with her.

So suddenly did the subtle drugs absorb their faculties, that hardly had they reached their chamber ere they sank upon the bed. McDonald noticed, with a flush of vicious triumph, that they had neither nerve nor thought enough to lock the door.

- "Mine!" he said: "mine!"
- "Madelen," murmured Corinne, faintly, "I feel strangely sleepy. Am I pale?"
- "Very pale, madame," said the faithful girl; "and I am strangely sleepy, too. Are you not well?"
- "I do not know, Madelen. Can you lock the door? All is not right. I have a presentiment, Madelen. Try and rouse yourself for my sake."

A thought of evil found its way through her numbed senses, and she half rose. The effort was her last before total unconsciousness ensued.

"Madelen," she said, faintly—"Madelen, there is danger; I am sure there is. Try to lock the door. I cannot rise."

She fell back slowly. Madelen caught the contagion of dread, and, brave in her devotion, struggled against the overpowering desire to remain passive. She rose, and felt her way blindly. Her eyelids lowered, as though pulled down by leaden weights.

She staggered to find the key; grasped at the chairs and bedcurtains for support; and finally, unable to reach the lock, she fell across the threshold, guarding the way with her senseless body—faithful to the last.

McDonald heard her fall. He was drinking deeply to stimulate his evil soul, that he might not falter in his dark purpose; but when he heard the French girl fall, he relinquished his drink.

Rising to his feet, he passed his hand dizzily across his brow. He could not think of the monstrous sin intended.

But passion overpowered his better nature, and his senses swam in a drunken whirl as he stole toward the chamber door. He pushed it.

The resistance of a heavy, yielding form told him what the obstacle was. He obtained a partial opening, and saw the form of Madelen.

"Curse her!" he said, savagely; and, caring nothing what injury he might inflict, he applied his utmost force to the panels, and Madelen rolled over.

He stooped to lift Madelen out of the way. He rose; his gaze set darkly, dangerously on the beautiful equestrienne, and he took two steps toward her.

Then he stopped. A powerful hand took him by the shoulder in a grip of iron.

"Ah, here, old friend?" and the music of the deep-toned voice rang with awful mockery. "How kind of you to take so much care of my poor girl! I am grateful, very grateful."

McDonald could have shrieked in terror, but that his terror stifled itself by its very intensity. There was death in the haggard, swarthy cheek; death in the burning, sunken eye; death in the nervous grasp that shifted from his shoulder to his throat.

"George Gambert!" he whispered, hoarsely.

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"Your old friend, George. Come, give me your hand, Mac; your hand—see, I give you mine."

He released McDonald's throat. The poacher reeled away half suffocated. George Gambert laughed. It was the laugh of a murderer.

McDonald looked round for a way of flight. Gambert stood before the doorway, his eye on Simon's throat, again his nervous fingers twining and playing together.

"Is this your bridal-chamber, Mac?—that Corinne's nuptial couch, or is she lost in love, and this a place of foul dishonor?

Tell me, and the truth—a lie will avail you nothing, since you are to die."

"To die! Merciful Heaven!"

"I hope you may find it so," said Gambert, grimly; "you are going soon there or elsewhere."

The wretched culprit shuddered in every vein; there was no hope, no mercy for him—he was held powerless in the leonine grip of a man who was mad with a vengeful thirst.

"Gambert," he said—"Gambert, on my soul, by the sky above us, by the great power we must meet at judgment, I have not harmed Corinne—I swear it."

"And a dying man should speak truth. Besides, my old friend Mac would not tell a lie, nor be a traitor, nor ruin a good and innocent girl; he is all honor, nobility, a gem of manhood, an example of kingly honesty. What a pity such a man should have to die!"

"Gambert, surely you are not going to kill me?"

"I am. Have you spoken truth?"

"As I have a soul to pray for."

"I did intend to strangle you like a dog; but since I see you are not telling a lie, you shall have the chance of dying like a man. Come with me."

"Whither?"

"Shall I drag you out, or will you walk? Come!"

Overpowered by the lion-tamer's irresistible will, McDonald prepared to follow him meekly.

George Gambert's grip was again fastened on his throat. George Gambert paused to look back upon Corinne; something of the old fondness was in face and voice.

"Poor girl! poor Corinne!" he said. "Come and gaze upon her, Mac. See what you have made her; shame in early age, and that is a deep line on her brow. So glad, so beautiful a creature she was; so firm—so fearless in her taintless pride; and see how she lies there, ruined in soul and body."

"Gambert, on my oath-"

"Swear it in Hades—she is unpolluted, you would say—but can she ever be to me what she has been? Not all the oaths you could swear—not all the bitter tears she may weep, could give me back the Corinne of my dream. Corinne—Corinne! my lost, my beautiful Corinne!"

The poacher turned his face away as well as he was able, as Gambert stooped and touched Corinne with a caressive lip. A great sob shook him through—a tear glistened and fell on her cheek.

Then he turned as fierce and grim again to McDonald. He spoke no more. His giant pressure impelled McDonald onward, out of Corinne's chamber—out of the hotel—out of the quiet town, and into a dark, lonely by-lane.

Every feature of the place fixed itself indelibly on McDonald's mind; the deep wheel-ruts, the green overhanging hedges, the wide, weed-grown, stagnant ditches, and the broken gate, hanging loosely on its rusty hinges, It was a dying man's photograph of his last surroundings.

"Now," said Gambert, once more releasing his captive, "here, under the solemn sky, the starlit canopy to which one dead face will be turned upward ere we part, we fight our battle—foot to foot, hand to hand, without a weapon, without a witness. Are you ready?"

And Gambert, waiting, bared his powerful arm.

- "Are you ready?"
- "Gambert, I am praying."
- "The better for the blackness of your soul."
- "Spare me!"

George Gambert pointed upward solemnly.

"Ask mercy there, and I will say amen."

McDonald took a last look at the tranquil night, the quiet meadow-land, the twinkling stars. The moon shone through a blue wide rift of cloud, and the fated man knew in his inmost heart that when the blue sky closed, and the moon was hidden,

his cars would hear no sound, his eyes would be closed in death.

He lifted a beseeching brow.

"Think of the old times, George."

The inexorable voice replied:

"Are you ready?"

McDonald raised a feeble hand in self-defense—the haggard, swarthy face before him lighted up with a grim, red flush, and one swift, terrific blow from Gambert's powerful arm stretched McDonald dead at his feet.

"Expiation!" Gambert said, with somber quietude. "Expiation!"

CHAPTER XLII.

HER RESTING-PLACE.

Leaving the dead man where he had fallen, Gambert returned to Springbourn Hotel. His fine features were rather sorrowful than stern now. Vengeance was done, the savage thirst was quenched; his thoughts grew sad, reverting to the old love days—to Corinne.

No revengeful reflection was in his heart as he turned from the green, quiet lane where McDonald's form lay stretched out in death. Treacherous and heartless as he had been, a false friend and unscrupulous libertine, he was not worth pity.

Returning calmly, with a brow untroubled by anything but sorrow, and the sorrow for Corinne, Gambert sought the chamber he had entered in time to save her. She lay exactly as he had left her, still senseless.

The man stood with folded arms and gazed upon her, while his proud chest heaved with pain. She was so beautiful, in spite of all, in spite of her faithlessness to him, in spite of her

seeming sin, that his soul thrilled with a yearning to take her back again—give her the old place in his love.

Though he deemed her passion-sullied, the woman had not gone out of his affection yet; it was part of his powerful nature; it had grown with his manhood, and lived in defiance of what would have killed tenderness in other men. The idol of his worship lay before him, a broken idol, desecrated by outrageous sacrilege, but the idol of his worship still.

So he stood and gazed, while sad thoughts thronged, and sweet, fond memories, turning into bitterness now, were recalled. So he stood and gazed, when Corinne, waking, saw him.

"Gambert!" she said, rising with a burning blush of self-reproachful shame and fear; "George!"

Then remembering her position, she cowered down, hiding her face.

"Corinne," he said, with deep, intense emotion, "was it to be this thing—the mistress of a criminal, forger, incendiary—that you left me? Had my love no charm, no claim, that you threw it away for the sake of such a present, and the certainty of a worse future?"

Tears began to gather thickly in her eyes. Had he been angry she would have listened silently and in dread. But he spoke sorrowfully, grieving for her sake, and each sad, reproachful word touched home.

"It was not good, it was not wise," he went on in the same broken tone, "it was not kind to me. Had you told me, Corinne; had I known your love was changed and gone back to him, I should have resigned you without bitterness and endured my own pain silently, so that you were happy; but to be a traitress, a wretched wanton, upon whom the world will look in scorn—"

"No," she said, lifting her flushed and beautiful face. "No, Gambert, as I live. Let the world heap scenn upon me if it

will—you, even you, scorch me with reproach—I can look up to Heaven and say I am not guilty."

"Asy, you would swear it dying, for women see no guilt or shame in passion. I knew the man too well to be gulled into that belief. You have traveled with him, been his companion for many days, used his adopted name, and are not his wife. Yet you say you are not guilty."

"It was a fatal error," she said, tearfully; "but you would believe me if you knew all. I was rash, indiscreet. I yielded to a mad infatuation; but though I was lured on to the abyss, I never loved him guiltily; and I have feared him, Gambert, for I saw it was his purpose to betray me."

"With what other purpose did he tempt you? Could the man who was such a traitor to his friend be honorable to a rash and heedless woman, who, reckless of pride, fair fame, and purity, went with him like the willing thing she is?"

- " No. no."
- "Why wring your hands and cry denial of a truth?"
- "Would to Heaven that I had never seen him."
- "It was a cursed hour. I had a friend till then. I had a dream of joy that I thought would last a life-time. I had not the burden of a crime upon me,"
 - "A crime!"
- "If it be a crime to deal righteous retribution; yours was a fatal passion, Corinne—it killed him."
 - "Killed him; killed who? Not McDonald?"
- "He has gone to his last account," said Gambert, grimly; "the treacherous sin he had done clung to his arm and made it nerveless; to give him fair and open chance, we met foot to foot and hand to hand; his heart was weak, he could not fight, so he died."

Corinne shuddered.

- "Dead!" she said, "and I the cause. Oh! Gambert, Gambert, this is terrible indeed. He was your friend."
 - "Was. That is long since, and then he turned and struck

me with an accursed sting that withdrew all my happiness. Had he been my twin brother I would have slain him."

The beautiful equestrienne buried her forehead in the pillows and sobbed in silence. Her grief that he had died by Gambert's hand was as great as her grief that he was dead.

"It is like a dream of horror," she said, "that you, who were his faithful friend, should have slain him, and through me. Do not look at me so, George; reproach me, curse me, but do not give me tenderness and pity."

"Me," said Gambert, sadly. "I thought that I should kill you when I found you, and it were better you had not lived to become what you have; but I loved you, Corinne, and I could not harm you."

"It is worse to doubt me—to believe me a thing of willing, guilty shame. I know my situation seems like sin."

"I found McDonald in this chamber."

"Here!" and the warm blood crimsoned her fair brow and neck. "Then he came by stealth, by treachery—and Madelen, poor Madelen, whose devotion saved me. Our wine was drugged."

"If he did that, the death I gave him was too merciful. Are you deceiving me, Corinne? We part to-night, and shall never meet again. I would give much could I believe you innocent."

"Heaven, when my word is heard, knows I speak the truth in saying this. I am as you have known me, as free from shame as when we parted last at Drocburn. I cannot hope for pardon, Gambert; I wronged you too deeply for that; but I would not go forth as I must go, alone, friendless, and thought guilty by you."

Gambert breathed heavily. Her face and voice were truthful. It was a gleam of sunshine to believe her innocent, after all.

"We can never be anything to each other now," she said.
"The dead man is a barrier between us; but though I have brought you much misery, George, I should like you to

think of me without shame. Wake Madelen, and ask the truth of her."

- "Your companion—your hireling! Who is the woman that will not tell a lie for gold?"
- "Then let us part," said Corinne, gliding from the bed; "and Heaven have mercy on me in my desolation. I tell you, George, and swear it solemnly, that I always loved you better than I did McDonald. I say it now, though he had fascinated me—and I am sorry for his fate. When we left Drocburn—when we were going away from you, and I began to see his purpose, I bitterly regretted my rashness. I was stunned, bewildered, when I found myself in the coach with him. I was senseless when he took me, and when I saw my danger I wanted him to let me return."
 - "And he-"
 - "Laughed at my fears-soothed me with promises."
 - "Words-as easily broken as deeply sworn."
- "And I told him when we reached here that if he dared forget how deeply I had sinned, and what I had risked for him, he had better have never been born."
- "But being in his power, and he knowing his influence over you, could afford to laugh again."
- "He did not; he began to understand me better, and I watched him carefully. The vail began to fall, and I saw his intention. I lost respect for him, and with respect went my infatuation. I should have left him had I not so far compromised myself."
- "He played his game well; so did you, to see me day by day, and yet in secret have fond dalliance with him, then meet me with a smile, and act as if my love had full requital. I had faith in you—thought that you alone of all the sex would not dissemble; but it is in your nature. Hopes built on woman's truth are built on sand, and washed away with the first tide that comes."
 - "I cannot ask yot to forgive me," she said; "and I shall go

away very wretched, for McDonald's death is at my dcor, and you will think of me as one lost to womanhood. I have deserved it, George, and I must bear it."

The uncomplaining, plaintive pathos of her voice touched him at last. Looking upon her as she stood with lowered head and drooping figure, he could not forget what she had been to him.

He had lifted Madelen from the floor and placed her on a couch in the outer room. In the midst of his stern, despairing sadness he did not forget his native chivalry. Madelen was recovering now, and she had heard the latter portion of the interview.

The door of communication was open, and Madelen, listening to what followed, caught the sound of her own name.

"Ask the truth of Madelen," Corinne said; "she has been my guardian angel, never leaving me for a moment. She knows how I began to doubt, and finally to fear him."

"Or she can say so," said Gambert; "but it does not matter. The worst is over, Corinne; my faith is broken. It can never be yours again."

"M'sieu," said a quiet voice—"M'sieu Gambert?"

"Well, my girl," he said, influenced in spite of himself by her simple beauty; "what would you say?"

"Believe madame, she speaks all truth—true as this."

She kissed a tiny crucifix worn in her breast; the action carried conviction with it.

"The count is a bad man," she said—"one who would betray—and madame had to fear him. He put something in our wine to-night, or I should not have slept so soon and heavily."

"Tell Mr. Gambert all you know, from the time of the catastrophe at the hippodrome," said Corinne.

"I will," exclaimed the girl, quickly. "I was with the carriage when m'sieu the count came through the crowd, and you were in his arms."

- "In what condition?"
- "Insensible—quite like the dead; and he told the postilion to make speed—so we reached here."
 - "Were you to stay here?"
- "No; but the count made pretexts and detained us, and we were to start to-morrow—always to-morrow."
- "Till he saw a chance of accomplishing his infernal purpose," said Gambert," between his teeth. "Go on, my girl."
- "That is all, m'sieu, except that madame told me her misgiving, and so I watched over her. I am but a girl, m'sieu, but I was protection, and I have heard madame speak of you fondly, very fondly."
 - "Hush, Madelen."
- "Madame said I was to tell all I knew," said the French girl, naively; "and madame did speak fondly of M'sieu Gambert. I have seen her weep for you, m'sieu."
 - "Tears come ready enough."
 - "Not from the heart, m'sieu."
 - "A good reply; I thank you from my heart for it."

He motioned her to go. She went.

- "Corinne," he said, gravely, "for your sake I rejoice to hear this. You were true to yourself, however false you were to me; and now——"
 - "Can you forgive me, George?"
- "I do, and—do not touch me, Corinne, or the old witchery that enthralled me may make me less than a man—we must be strangers henceforth, but I would not leave you to danger and temptation. You want money?"
- "Good Heaven! do not talk to me in that way, so coldly—quietly, as though arranging business, when my heart is almost broken."
- "Half the profits of the hippodrome are yours, by right of contract," he went on, calmly, "and you shall have a check for the amount. You are rich, and can revel in pleasure.

Women soon forget what they do not wish to remember, so I have no doubt you will be happy enough."

She heard him without replying.

- "I go abroad," he said; "not that I fear punishment because of killing McDonald, but the deed will haunt me, and the soil of England is accursed to me. I shall wander over the face of the earth, and find a quiet grave. So farewell, Corinne; if you can take this hand—it slew your lover—take it."
- "It slew my betrayer, Gambert—it avenged you. I knew it would happen when you met."
 - "Can you take it?"

She knelt, repressing a shudder, took his hand and pressed it to her heart.

- "I wish it would strike me as surely," she said, "since I have nothing to live for now."
- "Let go," he whispered, huskily. "Farewell; the check will be at the banker's—and—and—farewell."

He turned to leave her. Corinne shricked aloud.

"George, George, don't leave me; take me with you. Let me be your servant, slave, anything, so that you forgive and take me with you."

He paused, struggling with a world of wild emotion. She was there beside him, with streaming eyes and supplicating hands, repentant, desolate, beautiful, and sick with grief.

- "Corinne," he said, hoarsely; "Corinne, this madness is too much; how can I take you with me? How can I leave you when you bid me stay?"
- "George, take me with you; I shall die if you do not. When the sound of your footsteps cease I shall fall dead. Forgive me, punish me if you will, but let me be with you."

She conquered him. The struggle ended, and he opened his arms wide. She gave a thrilling cry, and leaped into them, close to his heart, locking herself there as if never more to part.

"Corinne, temptress, wife," he said, lowly, "we will go

together, and whether our lives end in suffering, or we find happiness, we will love each other as we used."

Corinne clung to him, nestling to her resting-place, the strong brave heart whose every throb was hers.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DAMOCLES.

Michael Ewrick was in Charnett, its acknowledged lord and master. He had attained the end for which he had worked, but the conquest was dearly obtained.

The man, proud, triumphant, and apparently secure, could not be happy. He lived in dread, haunted by the knowledge that he had a subtle and a terrible foe at work—an avenger tracking him step by step.

- "I would give much to know what has become of Kendrake," he said to his confidant and accomplice, Reuben Uxley; "his absence means no good to us."
- "I would rather discover where O'Neil is," said Uxley, with a silent shiver; "there is the danger. He has escaped from the well; I looked, and saw it empty."
- "Now that I am here," Michael said, and he struck his foot upon the oaken floor of the grand old hall, "here in the house of my ancestors, master of my birthright, Lord Michael Ewrick Lois, I will not yield to my enemies, even if they be fiends in human shape."
- "Our enemies are helpless," Uxley said; "they can do nothing, prove nothing. Who would believe O'Neil's wild story? who associate you with the child's abduction?"
- "True, but they are too quiet. Leonora's advisers have ceded her claim too easily; a tempest is rising, and now that her child is with her, I have lost more than half my hope of winning her."

- "Why not resign the hope altogether?"
- "I cannot, Uxley; my passion for her is a killing malady—a delirium that will destroy me if I do not possess her. She must be mine—she shall be!"
 - "Not willingly. You will never win her by fair words."
- "I shall try. I have subdued a prouder soul; and she—if she will not come to my breast, shall grovel at my feet. I would she were in Charnett."
 - "Where is she?"
- "In London, under Pentland's care. When she is mine," said Michael, "all is accomplished—earth has no more to give."

At this moment Stephen Lester entered; the man now held position as steward.

"My lord," he said, "a gentleman is below waiting to see you."

Michael took the card and read the name of Wolf Blake.

"Let him come," he said.

Wolf had not staid for ceremony; he was close on Lester's heels.

"Lord Michael Ewrick, I greet you," he said, with a careless bow. "Mr. Uxley, too."

He flung himself into a chair.

"You can retire," Michael said to Lester; and when he was gone, added: "Now, Wolf Blake, why are you here?"

"To congratulate you," was the reply, "on your accession to the estate. I am proud that I have been able to help my friend."

"As he paid you for the help," said Michael, in a tone that would have warned a man less accustomed to danger, "it would be wise in you to forget him."

Wolf Blake laughed.

"My dear lord," he said, "I come to serve you again. I come to give you warning, and you had better profit by it.

You remember that little affair at Mr. Pentland's—the burglary?"

"I remember nothing."

"Far be it from me to awaken unpleasant recollections, and, as you remember nothing, let me put it in this way: Two professional gentlemen, were employed by me to try their skill upon an iron safe, and we found some documents relating to a bit of the Charnett history, and particularly concerning Michael Ewrick. Now they were so interesting that I took the trouble to have them copied, and the copies I gave to you; the originals I kept."

"S'death!" said Michael, fiercely; "are you mad to tell me this, or is it a lie?"

"The truth, on my honor as a gentleman—a dangerous truth; but I am prepared—this, you see, is one of Colt's finest weapons, carefully loaded and capped. I brought it in case you might be angry with me; and I came all the way from London to tell you that I lost the originals of these documents—they were taken from me by Rodwin Duke."

"Malediction!"

"You swear like a Frenchman. Seriously, my dear lord, I am doing you a great service, at a considerable risk, and no chance of getting anything by it. The precious bits of parchment are gone: and that is not the worst."

Michael, with his savage black eyes fixed upon the man, who was on his guard with his revolver, repeated:

"Not the worst?"

'No. Just hear this. Mr. Pentland and Dr. Hamilton are on their way here, accompanied by—whom do you think?"

"Tell me."

"Well, the Lady Leonora and John Kendrake."

"Let them come—let them enter; and you, if you will rid me of John Kendrake, shall have his weight in gold."

"It is not to be done, my dear lord."

"Do you fear?"

"Not Satan in person—not you; but I do fear those who are in company with the others I have namad."

Michael waited in impatient suspense.

- "Two detectives," said Blake, "four policemen; these are from Scotland Yard, then there are some from France."
 - "From France?"
- "Monsieur Gustave Chicto's minister," said Blake, "Mr. Robert O'Neil; they come to arrest Reuben Uxley for forgery and attempted murder, and Michael Ewrick, alias the Chevalier de Buradoc, for the murder of Lord Sydney."
- "Then," said Michael, with desperate resolution, "my race is run; but it shall end in Charnett. The house of my ancestors, if it cannot be mine, shall be my funeral pyre. When are they coming, my foes?"
- "They will be here in less than an hour—they travel by post from London; so, my lord, make the most of your short-lived reign, and fly while there is time. Rascal as I am, I could not let this danger come to an old friend without apprising him of it."
- "And I thank you for it," said Michael, drawing a magnificent ring from his finger. Here is a gem a king might be proud to wear."
- "Thanks, Lord Michael; and now, unless you mean to fight it out and die like a lion in your lair, lose no time in seeking safety. Adieu."

The London adventurer went; he had told the truth. Lady Leonora and her friends arrived within the hour. They found the house barricaded, and, when it was broken into, Michael Ewrick and his son were gone.

"He is not far away," said O'Neil, in a tone of conviction; "we shall hear more of him before his career is ended."

So Kendrake thought; so Leonora feared. The forest-keeper, now restored to her confidence, thinking wistfully of Ishmael, for his sake hoped in his secret heart Michael would escape.

O'Neil seemed to read his thoughts.

"It cannot be, John Kendrake," he said; "his fate is in my hands; I shall not spare him; I must be his fate; it is destined."

"My destined work is taken from me," Kendrake said; "a higher power has placed it in your hands. I have had to act in fetters, or Michael Ewrick would not be living now."

"What is your secret?" Leonora asked.

"A sad one, lady. Michael Ewrick is the father of my sister's child. Now that the bitter truth is out, you can comprehend me better."

"Now that the bitter truth is out," said O'Neil, "I cannot comprehend why you have ever spared him. A wrong so great would have made me merciless."

"But the poor girl made me promise when she was dying that I would never lift my hand against him."

"You can keep that promise, Kendrake, unless such occasion should arise as will force you to remember a promise quite as sacred—that sworn at the lodge over the body of your foster-brother."

The forest-keeper turned away and went from the apartment. He hoped devoutly that no such occasion would arise; yet as he hoped the pale and plaintive face of Lord Sydney rose reproachfully before him.

"As Heaven may direct, so will I act," the keeper said. "My foster-brother's murderer is Ishmael's sire; and between the sacred promise to spare him and the sacred oath to slay, I know not what to do."

Leonora and O'Neil were alone when the keeper left them. The beautiful lady of Charnett was strangely moved when she said:

"I owe you more than life, Mr. O'Neil; you are the savior of my child—the destroyer of my enemy."

"He is not destroyed yet, lady; but he will be. Your husband shall be avenged."

"We are strangers, Mr. O'Neil; yet you have done much for me."

"Strangers as the world goes, lady," and his hand, scarcely less delicate than her own, touched hers with a touch that thrilled; "but there is between us the sympathy of hate and love."

The soft fire of his eyes magnetized her. The proud, magnificent woman trembled.

"When Sydney is avenged," he said, "may I say more?"

Her breast heaved slowly. In Robert O'Neil's touch, and in his gaze, in the quiet of his handsome face and the music of his voice, there was a power that subdued her.

"When Sydney is avenged," she said—"when Michael Ewrick is dead, you may say anything."

The noble form glided from him. O'Neil watching her, with a gleam of admiration and a growing passion in the depths of his soul, muttered:

"If I could suffer Michael to live, it would give him a keener pang that death to see her mine; but he is to die."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LAST.

On the night when Leonora returned, a strange and irresistible infatuation compelled Michael to remain in Charnett; he knew the crisis of his fate was near.

Night shadowed the grand old pile and threw its darkness over the dusky hills when, with Henri by his side, that proud and sinful scion of a proud and sinful race stood looking his last upon the inheritance he dared not claim.

"They are upon my track," he soliloquized; "the Sin Phantom—that terrible minister of Chicto's League; for memory is with me now, and I recognize him in the fair-haired artist who

knew my darkest secrets and told me them with such infernal mockery; but though I am hunted down, though I have sinned in vain, my vengeance shall be felt. Charnett is my birthright; it shall never be inherited by another."

"Michael."

He turned, and saw Reuben Uxley at his side. The old man, faithful to the last to Agnes Brewer's son, had come to warn him.

- "I have watched and waited for you, Michael," the old man said, "in spite of the peril near."
 - "Peril to you, Uxley?"
- "Ay! O'Neil is here; here with Lady Leonora, John Kendrake, Dr. Hamilton, and Mr. Pentland; there are strangers with them, Michael; hunters, who wait for the lion to enter his lair."
- "They wait for me," said Michael, grimly; "well, they shall see me once again."
- "Stephen Lester has confessed," Uxley continued; "betrayed us to save his own wretched life; discovered you as Lord Sydney's murderer."
- "Let come what may," said Michael, savagely, "I will not forego revenge and triumph. Leonora shall be mine. I have sworn it, and will keep my word even if it be in the hour of my death."
 - "Think of the risk."
- "I have thought of all. Take care of Henri, old friend, and give to him the faith you have given me. At midnight look upon this scene, and you shall see a spectacle such as Charnett has not seen. If I am not with you, the tragedy will be over."
 - "What do you mean?"
- "Leonora is there." Ewrick's voice was thick with passion, and the old demon lighted up his fine black eyes. "There lie revenge and triumph. The sky shall glow red to-night, and blood shall run."

He lifted Henri to his breast, kissed him, and wrung Uxley's hand.

"In this," he said, giving the lawyer a packet, "you will find my wishes concerning him. If I do not return, escape, and live for his sake; Reuben, promise me."

"I do, Michael; but why not forego this madness, and jescape?"

"If to relinquish my intention would erase all the blackness from the past, I would not do it now. My soul is set. I am conquered; but I will die like Samson, bringing destruction to my foes. Farewell."

"Farewell, if we do not meet again."

Michael strode on; the cry of his child calling for him struck his car and shook his resolution, but only for a moment.

Charnett House was a strange old place; the existence of a secret entrance had long been suspected, but never discovered except by him who used it now.

It was a subterranean passage leading from the stables and communicating with the lower corridors.

Once in the corridors, access to the basement was easy, and then Michael was in the house, and the house was at his mercy.

Perfect quiet reigned; the intended incendiary crept about with shoeless feet.

He was armed to the teeth, and would have mercilessly slain any one who came in his way. The covered lantern that he carried showed his form, and his face was devilish.

Materials for his work were easily found; he piled a heap of fagots and loose firewood on the floor; he worked with especial care, and did not desist until he had laid a train that, once fired, would insure destruction.

"The old house will catch like tinder," he muttered; "and those who do not escape soon, will have a foretaste of Hades."

He opened his lamp and fired the combustibles; they caught easily: coils of smoke and streaks of flame rose through the

crackling twigs, and began to lick round the panels. When these began to burn, the house was doomed.

Wild with vengeful exultation, Michael sped to Leonora's chamber, uninterrupted, unimpeded; his hand upon a pistol, ready for the first who came.

But the inmates were slumbering peacefully, while the fire raged beneath them.

Leonora's chamber door was unlocked. She had faithful hearts around her, and did not fear. So Michael found no obstacle in his way, and his heart gave a leap when he stood within her chamber.

"I may escape with her," he thought; "the rest may burn."
Warned by his previous experience, he dealt first with the child. A silk kerchief slipped over her mouth and tied securely kept her silent when she woke; but her start of terror as her eyes fell upon the intruder roused her mother.

Michael's hand upon the lady's throat choked her cry of indignation, and her heart sank heavily. She had little pity to expect from her husband's murderer.

"Monster," she whispered, "do you not fear the dead?"

"Not half so much as I love the living," he said, with a low laugh and a glance that was an outrage. "You are mine at last, Leonora, my peerless, magnificent cousin! And if you would not see me send a dagger to your child's breast, be silent and come with me."

The threat froze her into silence. She saw the gleam of the dagger in his hand, and looked from it to Alice. He was sufficiently thoughtful even in the fever heat of passion to wrap a cloak round Leonora ere his powerful arm drew her from the bed. She did not resist, though if her glance of insulted womanhood could have killed, he would have fallen dead.

The moment her feet were on the floor, she seized Alice and threw her to the other side of the couch, out of Michael's way. The sudden action disconcerted him for an instant, and in that instant Leonora, powerful and supple as a tigress, leaped upon

him, twining both her soft hands round his throat. Thinking of her husband, slain by him, and his purpose in her chamber, she did not call for help.

Michael was not prepared for the attack, and his wild love was so great that, though in jeopardy, he let his dagger fall lest it should hurt by accident the lithe form clinging to him. She was in truth a magnificent creature, and her beauty in its present guise seemed to blind and make him drunk.

He wound a strong arm round her waist and drew her to him with such crushing force as to hurt her; then he tore her hands from his throat and smiled in her face.

"O, my Leonora," he said, "you need fight no more. I have swam through blood for you, and even in this the last hour that old Charnett House will stand, you shall be mine. I could not save you now, it is too late. The pile is fired and we shall die together, here in our bridal chamber."

Her shriek rang through the house, and there came back many an echo, for the fire had broken through the basement ceiling at last and now was raging fiercely on the ground floor; it was making rapid progress on every side.

O'Neil, always on the alert and prompt when roused, thought first of Leonora and her child; he divined the truth at once as to the incendiary, but did not think he was in the house.

Nor till when, bounding down the corridor, whose floor was hot under his feet, he heard her cry, and heard it answered by a laugh.

Shriek after shriek rang out; and a panther leaping from the jungle to its quarry's throat might have leaped as did O'Neil into the chamber and at Michael.

Leonora had called on O'Neil, and his one word "Here!" rang out like a trumpet note. Then he snatched the lady away and put her by the side of her child.

Michael picked up his dagger. O'Neil was unarmed. He bound a scarf round his hand; but before he began the death-battle he spoke to Leonora.

"To the picture-gallery!" he said, fixing his glittering eye on Michael; "that way is safe, dear lady. Take your child and away. The staircase is of stone, and the fire has hardly yet reached that wing."

"But you?" said Leonora.

"I stay," he said, "to settle a long account with the Chevalier de Buradoc."

Michael drew a revolver, but had not time to use it. O'Neil dashed it from his hand, and it went crashing through the window.

But for her child's sake Leonora would have staid to see the issue. The flames were coming and she dared not. John Kendrake and Ishmael coming to the rescue, took them away.

"Save all you can," said O'Neil to Kendrake. "I will save myself."

And again he faced the chevalier. For the first time in his life Michael felt afraid. His passion, checked in the moment of triumph, went back to its source, and made his heart tremble; and he feared the man he could not kill, the man who lived to thwart him, the man whose strength and daring were greater than his own.

"In this," Michael said, "the hour when one or both must die, tell me why you have hunted me down."

"Why?" The fair face whitened savagely. "Why? I am Cymon, Count Dunault, whom you tried to murder in the gambling-house. I am the Sin Phantom, through whose throat you sent a dagger, and whom you hurled into the Seine. I am Robert O'Neil, whom you sought to kill at Uxley's house in Charnett. I am Lord Sydney's friend; and—I love Leonora!"

Michael was answered; and after the first great shock came a revulsion; he grasped his dagger firmly, and struck at O'Neil, who, with the last word, closed with him.

It was an awful struggle. One of the walls fell crushing in, and the red fire poured in; but the combatants held on to each other. The flames and smoke formed a startling background

to the tragic scene; and the household, safe outside, looked on in terror.

"Leave him and come down!" shouted Kendrake, and Leonora beckoned; but O'Neil made no reply. He had just obtained possession of the dagger, and Michael Ewrick had fallen to his knees.

"You are a Charnett," said O'Neil, "and this saves you from the hangman. You are a traitor to the League, and this is Chicto's mark. You are my foe, and I always kill my foes."

Each time he spoke he struck a blow, and at the third blow left the dagger in. Michael fell backward on the floor.

O'Neil left him there. O'Neil escaped by the stone staircase, and, bleeding from seven wounds, joined the group who watched the blazing pyre.

"Lord Sydney is avenged!" he said, giving Leonora an ensanguined hand; "nothing will be left of his assassin but ashes."

At that instant a thrill of horror ran through the spectators. The roof fell in, and the windows of Leonora's chamber bulged open. The face of Michael appeared, scarred, and battered, and blackened with smoke, and burns, and blows from falling rafters, grimed with charcoal and gore; but still the face of a living man.

He was struggling to release himself from the weight of a fallen beam, but he could not do it. His head was out of the window so he could not suffocate, and life was so strong within him that he could not die.

"John Kendrake," said O'Neil, "it is your turn now. He is lingering in torture. Remember both your promises—one to be merciful, the other to kill. To kill is now to be merciful."

The forest-keeper did not hesitate; he raised his gun.

"Stop!" said O'Neil; "let it be with this bullet."

He gave to Kendrake the bullet found in the door-post of the lodge, the one with which Michael had slain Lord Sydney—the bullet with a steel core.

The ramrod rang in the muzzle as it sent the ball home. Then the unerring aim was taken, and the ball from Kendrake's weapon dashed through Michael's brain.

A jet of blood spurted out, and Michael heaved with a last throe; his body disappeared in a vast red gulf. The stately pile of Charnett, the ancestral home, was a heap of ruins, a crumbled, shapeless chaos; and in its midst Michael found his grave.

Two years elapsed; a new structure rose grandly, And its master was the Count Cymon Dunault, or Robert O'Neil. The regal woman leaning lovingly on his arm is Leonora, his wife.

John Kendrake is forest-keeper still. Ishmael is busy at college, winning scholarly honors, and dreaming of Alice.

What became of Reuben Uxley and Henri was not known. They were never seen in Charnett after the night of the fire.

It was a lonely spot in which McDonald died. His body was not discovered till Corinne and her lover were far away.

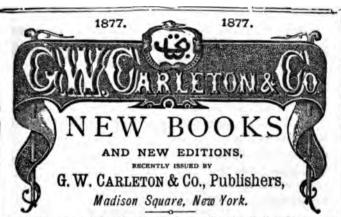
They went to Italy, taking Madelen with them; and under the skies of the sunny South they were married. The memory of McDonald was their only sorrow, the only cloud upon their happiness.

The beautiful equestrienne's passionate love repaid George Gambert for what he had suffered; and his old faith renewed grew stronger.

So we leave them.

The Charnett Arms still flourishes, and the coach runs to and fro. The travelers by the Midland line very often hear sturdy old Joe Scofield's coach-bugle wake the echoes of Charnett Hills.

THE END.



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